The future of electronic entertainment issue#130

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this season's essential sel
Previewed: Ninja Gaiden, Ki
Monster Hunter, Castlevania
Reviewed: Rogue Squadr
Billy Hatcher, Maximo 2, X
Games and the law – modc
console; Inside EA; Weird g
The making of TIE Fighter; E

XBOX | GAMECUBE | PLAYSTATION2 | PC | DREAMCAST | GBA

The winter collection





PlayStation 2
REVIEW
PAL
RATCHET AND CLANK 2
September 2003
XIII
PS2 REVIEW
EDGE



Imagine living in a world where the music scene's biggest names remained quiet all year up until November, when suddenly they would release albums at the same time. The silence of a long, empty 12 months would be broken by the crunching sound of The Strokes going up against Eminem going up against The Darkness going up against U2 going up against Madonna going up against P Diddy going up against Beyonce and so on and so on in a tangle of jostling for radio-play slots, TV promotions and floor space in your local branch of HMV. A ridiculous scenario, right? And yet this is precisely how today's videogame market plays out.

For Christmas this year you'll be given Konami's continuation of its *Pro Evo* series, Naughty Dog's *Jak and Daxter* sequel, Sega/Nintendo's *F-Zero* update and *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* and *XIII* and *Need for Speed Underground* and PC *Halo* and *The Lord Of The Rings: The Return of the King* and *SSX3* and *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron III* and *Maximo vs Army Of Zin* and *Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg* and *Ratchet & Clank 2* and *Project Gotham Racing 2* and *Hidden & Dangerous 2* and *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* and *Star Wars: Galaxies*... and more. Each title has the potential to top sales charts at any time of the year – some in simple quality terms, some on their developers' reputations and others on the strength of a licence – but here they all are in one fat, heaving clump. Why? That's a question **Edge** strives to answer this month (see p80).

At the other end of the commercial scale lies a different type of game, one existing out there on the periphery where few designers dare to tread – experiences such as *Boong-Ga Boong-Ga*, *Seaman* and *Gerry The Germ Goes Body Poppin'* – and **Edge** celebrates their existence this month on p68. Games like this won't be threatening to break any sales records this Christmas or any other, of course, but sometimes another new football update simply may not be enough to capture our imaginations, Yuletide cheer or not...



Features









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the 'industry wakes up' issue





















Prescreen

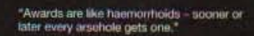
Regulars

Testscreen

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"Awards are like haemorrhoids – sooner or later every arsehole gets one."

frontend

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge



Case for the defence

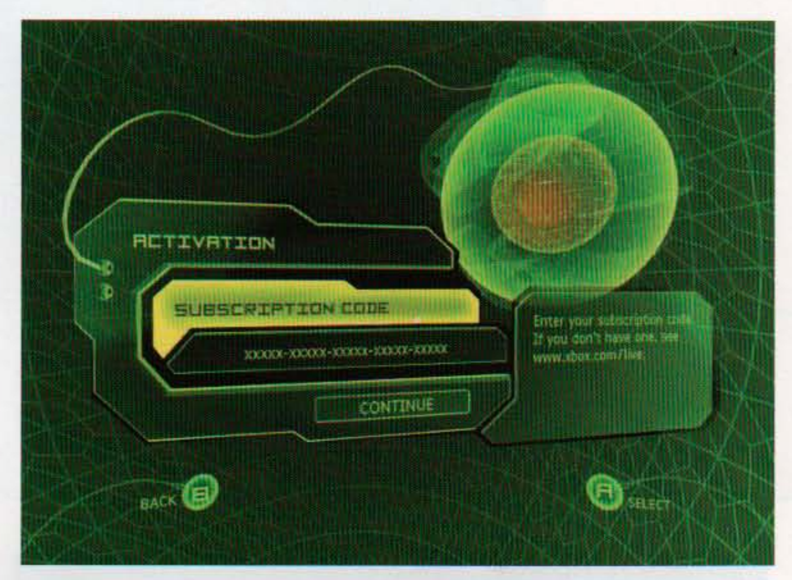
It only makes the headlines when games fall foul of it, but the law has a massive impact on the way the games industry works. Edge considers the state of play and some of the potential future flashpoints

For some the law is an ass, while for others, notably **Ian Hislop**, British justice can be characterised by its plantain-transmogrifying power; "If that's justice, I'm a banana," he quipped after one libel loss too far. Generally however, despite their contrasting stereotypes – fusty verses futuristic – videogames as a media have rarely fallen foul of UK law.

The occasional *Carmageddon* or *Grand Theft Auto* aside, the regulation of game software has seldom been a contentious issue. Indeed, strangely considering the hot air generated in Parliament and the tabloids when game violence does become a public concern, the regulatory framework for games is more open than that for video and films. Under most circumstances (see Rated!) videogames are exempt from the 1984 Video Recordings Act. Publishers only need to seek formal guidance from the British Board of Film Classification for mature titles. Around five per cent of UK games are rated in this manner, with examples of such recent non-controversial self-regulation including Activision's *Call of Duty* and Take Two's *Celebrity Deathmatch*. Both received 15 certificates.

Yet it is the issue of age, at least in the context of online games which has the potential to shape the future direction of the industry. Unlike offline games, which can be neatly compartmentalised, online games provide emergent experiences which in many cases can only be regulated retrospectively. Public concern over the position of under-16-year-olds in unmoderated chatrooms continues to grow too and seems likely to lead to future tightening of laws. Microsoft's pro-active withdrawal of its MSN Chat services in 28 countries just goes to prove the point. And the spotlight has started to start to fall on online games which offer such community elements.

"The legislative environment affecting all forms of online content is very much at an early stage. I would expect such games to come under scrutiny when the market increases and when non-players have an understanding of the games and the facilities," says **Sebastian Belcher**, a senior associate at media lawyers Harbottle & Lewis. "Current attention is focused on the more obvious forms of online communication, though it is possible that online games could be affected almost unwittingly as a by-product of legislation aimed at chatrooms and other communication forums."



With the videogame industry gearing up its online operations, companies like Microsoft and Sony may have to be wary that they won't unwittingly be targeted by legal reforms aimed at regulating chatrooms

"Realtime internet communications via game consoles will become a major social and political phenomenon during the next two years"

"I predict realtime internet communications via game consoles will become a major social and political phenomenon during the next two years," says **Andrew Bud**, chairman of SMS gateway operator mBlox, who has been involved in discussions on the subject through his role as board member of the Mobile Entertainment Forum trade association. "It's something the online gaming industry really needs to start thinking about now as most companies have little experience in this type of regulatory environment."

One salient point is the increasing use of realtime voice communications within services such as Xbox Live (see Ringing the changes). "Something like Xbox Live may be okay because it's anonymous to a degree, as well as being more unstructured than chatrooms," Bud points out. But bodies such as the Home Office Working Group on Child Protection, which includes

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Patrolling the borders

One of the contentious (and plain annoying) issues for gamers is the way console manufacturers employ regional lock-outs in their hardware to stop the flow of software from one territory to another. But what initially appears to be a restrictive practice, at least for consumers, is in fact one counter-balanced by the rights of businesses.

"There's tension between the laws of intellectual property rights, whose purpose is to protect owners' rights, and competition law, which seeks to protect consumers especially in relation to price," explains Tatiana Kruse.

If, therefore, it could be shown that regional coding was a way of artificially maintaining higher software prices, the competition authorities would have to move in. At present though, this seems unlikely.

"Console owners are under permanent fire from very powerful and coordinated consumers organisations to abandon regional coding," says Vincent Scheurer. "The law is generally on the side of the console owners however."

And as he points out, the console manufacturers' legal protection extends much further than just hardware controls. "Even in the case of hardware such as Game Boy Advance, which doesn't feature regional lock-outs, publishers can and do use the courts to prevent shops from importing games from one zone and selling them in another," he says.

Notably, the 2002 fine handed out to Nintendo by the European commission for preventing parallel imports – that is prevent goods sold in one state from being sold in another – only applied to trade within EU countries, not trade between regional lock-out zones.

Indeed, the increasing pressure from developed countries to enforce the intellectual property rights of big business around the world makes it likely the situation with respect to ways of circumventing lock-outs, ie mod chips, will tighten.

"Where regional locks are connected to copy protection devices, the law if anything will be strengthened in future," predicts Scheurer. "In the UK, we've already seen a tightening of some aspects of criminal law relating to copyright infringement. I think dealing in mod chips, which reducing the effectiveness of copy protection technology, will become increasingly restrictive, and even criminalised, irrespective of whether they have other beneficial effects."



children's charities as well as companies such as Microsoft and various ISPs, remain sensitive to the implications of such communication channels, particularly with respect to issues such as online grooming. One positive aspect for videogame companies is that users of online games tend to be more identifiable than the average chatroom prowler.

"The fact that most of these games require payment by credit cards tends to keep younger children out, while limiting the scope for adults to remain untraceable," explains **Vincent Scheurer**, a barrister at commercial law firm Osborne Clarke. Microsoft's closed Xbox Live network helps in this respect, as it provides the company with tight control over user identification. The older demographic of its user base also gives some measure of protection.

As Scheurer's colleague at Osborne Clarke, **Frank Jennings** points out that there is generally assumed to be certain latitude as long as content or services aren't targeted directly at children. "Current government recommendations are that chatrooms targeted at children must be moderated," he says. This is potentially a big problem for a console manufacturer such as Nintendo; just one of the reasons, it's not rushing into the online space. In contrast, games aimed at over-18s should be able to continue unmoderated provided that reasonable controls are put in place to keep children out.

"The moderation of content is a difficult issue for service providers," Jennings says. "The dangers of providing an unmoderated service are that a service provider could be sued for allowing children to be subjected t inappropriate content. However, if a service provider moderates content but fails to remove inappropriate content, then they may again find themselves being sued."

"It is very important that the videogame industry is seen as being socially responsible in the way it distributes content to consumers"

Fears about the vulnerability of children is creeping back into offline games too, reckons Scheurer. "I don't anticipate any increased level of regulation while the age-rating system remains in force. What seem more likely is that new controls may be imposed over the way 16-plus and 18-plus games are marketed," he says. "The whole issue of marketing to children is coming under increasing scrutiny at the moment and some countries have already imposed strict additional regulations in this area."

"It is very important that the videogame industry is publicly seen as being socially



responsible in the way it distributes content to consumers, based on whatever social standards exist and by whatever means the content is accessed," agrees **Roger Bennett**, director general of UK trade body ELPSA. "Our role is to ensure that we have already made our case long before any legislation is formally proposed so that the impact on our industry is either nil or better when adopted. It's not a case of being reactive, we must always be ahead of the game."

A major part of ensuring the industry is prepared to meet these future requirements has been the setting up of the Pan European Games Information (PEGI) ratings. Similar in style to the current UK system, this is a voluntary rating system for 16 European countries. Launched in April, it allows companies to self-assess their games against a fixed set of criterion. An age rating of 3-plus, 7-plus, 12-plus, 16-plus or 18-plus is then worked out, with 16-plus or 18-plus ratings being independently verified by the Netherlands Institute for the Classification of Audio-visual Media; a task subcontracted to the Video Standards Council in the UK.

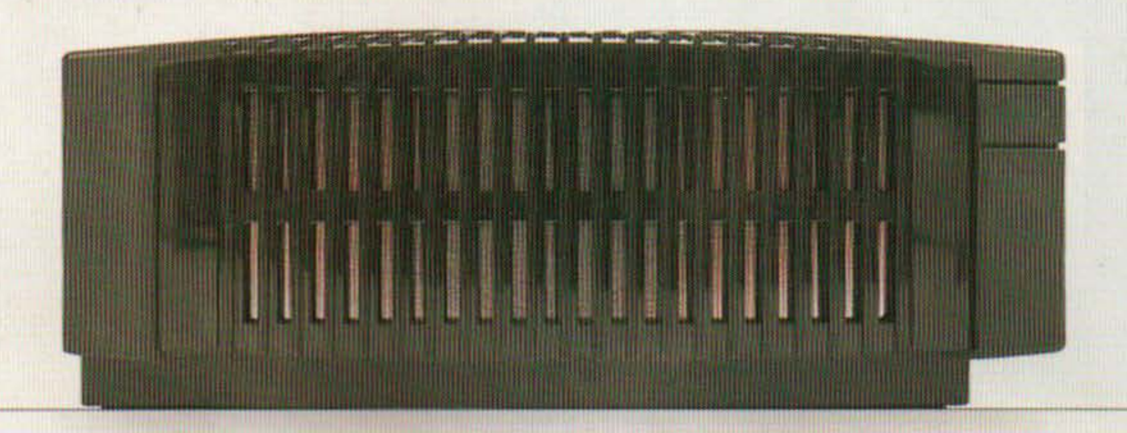
Some gaps in the armour remain. Even though Finland is part of the PEGI, it has existing laws on the content of games controlled by thresholds for 11- and 15-years-old. These will remain in place. Portugal is one country not adhering to the system, while Germany's participation depends on the degree of conformity with domestic legislation currently under discussion. Despite these admissions though, PEGI seems to be working well. Interestingly, of the 800-odd games already rated under the system, around a dozen are mobile games, submitted by Nokia for its N-Gage game deck. *Red Faction* and *Tomb Raider* have both been rated 12-plus for their violent content (11-plus in Finland).



Activision's *Call of Duty* is an example of the industry's self-regulation in effect, having been voluntarily submitted to the British Board of Film Classification due to its mature content, receiving a 15 certificate

The hard sell

If the laws surrounding videogame software are relatively clear, the same can't be said for hardware. Disputes between publishers and console manufacturers over the amount of control manufacturers have over the games released on their systems are as old as the industry itself. Indeed, there's a view that independent development was kickstarted with the formation of Activision back in 1980. It released unofficial games for Atari's VCS, prompting 18 months of lawsuits. Similarly Nintendo's strict licensing terms for the NES was circumvented during the late 1980s by companies which reverse-



Redirecting the heat

One recent close call for the future business of mobile entertainment companies is the forthcoming European legislation on E-Money. This would have potentially reduced the scope of charging using premium SMS. Crucially, this would have removed a key revenue stream for many mobile game developers, as premium SMS is one of the few ways they can get money directly from consumers, without dealing with a mobile network operators. The E-Money restrictions would have prohibited payment methods such as micropayments as well as online PINS, damping down what is a very fast growing market segment, worth around £150 million in the UK. Lobbying from trade bodies, notably the Mobile Entertainment Forum seems to have resulted in a change of heart, with a more liberal approach now expected to emerge.

"We've taken the lead in addressing both the Financial Services Authority in London and European commission in Brussels and it seems to have worked," says MEF board member Andrew Bud. "At the start of August, I was pessimistic but now I'm pretty optimistic."

engineered and unlocked its security chip. Today, in the light of global trade agreements and strong protection of intellectual property rights, anything invoking the spectre of piracy tends to be treated much more seriously.

For example, a recent Australian case found that Sony's use of regional coding was a "technological protection measure" that prevented piracy. Successful proceedings by Sony against a mod-chip maker in the UK also looked at non-infringing uses such as non-certified games development. The court found that there was little if any evidence of such uses and the primary reason for bypassing the coding was to allow playing of copied games.

Still some companies feel aggrieved by the restrictions placed on them. One veteran of the UK publishing scene, who preferred to remain anonymous, claims the console manufacturers' attitude is fundamentally stifling the industry's creativity. "There is no lack of talent, new ideas or inspiration, but when every single idea has to be vetted by a faceless committee, we will never move forward," he argues. "With the exception of console videogames most other media, while having some censorship or self-regulation, have freed themselves from the imposition of content values. I love *Pikmin* but I also love David Cronenberg's 'Crash' and Tarantino's 'Pulp Fiction'. We'll never see that quality until the shackles of software content approval are broken."

An interesting aside to this point is Jester Interactive's 1998 *Music* game for PlayStation. Although several games of a similar style had been put through Sony's approvals process, none had been passed because it was felt the genre of music-generation games wasn't an appropriate one during the early stages of PlayStation's lifecycle. A fluke of timing, Jester's proposal was the first to be received after PlayStation's massmarket success broadened the genres Sony would approve.

More recently, developers have been complaining about technically-focused hoo[p] jumping. A particular bugbear is the tough line being taken by Sony's concept approva[l] process. This requires all PlayStation2 games to have an online component, no matter how suited this may be for its style. A request was made to Sony about such issues but it couldn't find an appropriate spokesman to comment.

Scheurer, for one, thinks there may be changes in the power of console

"With the exception of console videogames most other media have freed themselves from the imposition of content values"



Realtime voice communication and wireless connectivity are examples of where fast-moving technology confronts the limits of static legislation: "If you can talk to people via a headset, it's almost a phone conversation," explains mBlox's Andrew Bud. "There's an argument such communication is actually more akin to an internet connect than a phone call, but the issue has yet to be settled," he explains

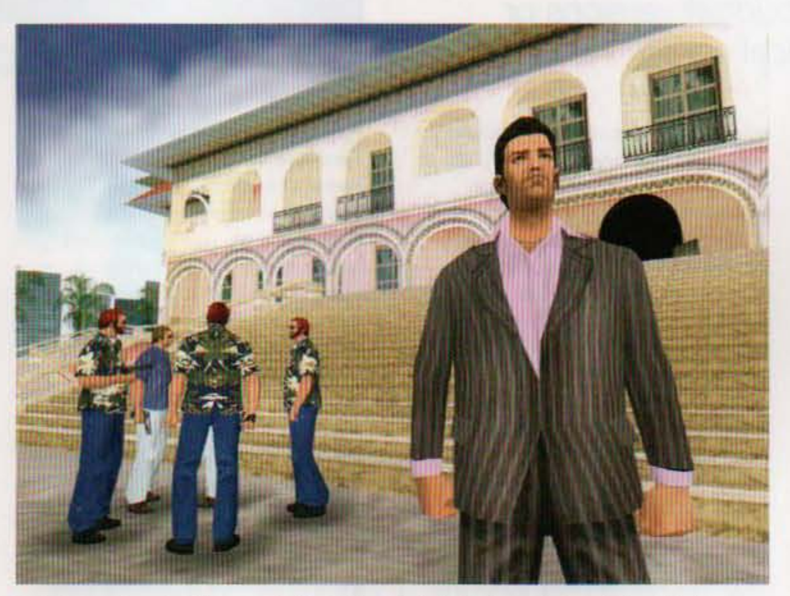


manufacturers in future. "These approval processes are pretty much under permanent scrutiny from competition authorities in most western countries," he says. "Where three companies dominate an entire industry to the extent that Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft dominate the console games industry, then (particularly in the EU) they will continually be forced to justify their practices." And as **Tatiana Kruse**, counsel and head of IT Law at Salans, points out, there have been previous rulings in this area. "In the mid-'90s, the old UK Monopolies and Merger Commission found that console manufacturers were using anti-competitive practices, by limiting the number of games that each licensee could produce," she says.

To some degree though, the argument that a tight approval policy ensures the technical quality of games with respect to bugs – itself a favourite strategy of Nintendo over the years – remains a persuasive one. "From a legal point of view, if such practices can be justified for purposes of quality control, so that the primary purpose is not to keep up prices or prevent market entry, I do not think they will be viewed as restrictive," says Kruse. After all, this bulletproofing is one of the reasons consoles are the massmarket platform rather than the PC.

However, Scheurer says it may not be enough in the long run. "The larger the industry and the greater the profits it delivers, the more attention it will attract from the authorities. Monopolies and oligopolies are not in themselves necessarily unlawful; so long as the console owners continue to evolve their rules so as to stay in line with the evolving legislative climate, they may be able to preserve their position for some time. But this monopoly will probably not remain in force in its current form indefinitely."

Jennings, on the other hand, can see even further into the future and foresee the glorious day when the console itself will be no more. "There will come a time when console architecture is sufficiently far advanced that an end user does not have to upgrade every few years," he muses. "In fact, the dedicated games console as we know it today may cease to exist. At this point standards will become harmonised and the approvals process by console manufacturers will cease." It's certainly a beautiful dream, although **Edge** for one, won't be holding its breath.



Rockstar's controversial title *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* looks like testing the boundaries of the law in the US, where it has been accused of inspiring random shootings in a recent high-profile case

Rated!: Videogames and the Video Recordings Act

Under Section 4 (1) of the Video Recordings Act 1984 (VRA) the British Board of Film Classification is the designated body for classifying video works. Certain types of work, including videogames are exempt from the VRA. This exemption can be forfeited in certain circumstances, as set out in Section 2 (2) of the act: "(2) a video work is not an exempted work for those purposes if, to any significant extent, it depicts:

(a) human sexual activity or acts of force or restraint associated with such activity

(b) mutilation or torture of, or other acts of gross violence towards, humans or animals

(c) human genital organ or human urinary or excretory functions

(d) techniques likely to be useful in the commission of offences.

Or is likely to any significant extent to stimulate or encourage anything failing with paragraph (a) or, in the case of anything falling within paragraph (b), is likely to any extent to do so.

(3) A video work is not an exempted work for those purposes if, to any significant extent, it depicts criminal activity which is likely to any significant extent stimulate or encourage the commission of offences.

TGS sees publishers gearing up for transition

Connectivity and accessibility dominate Japan's consumer game show, as handheld competition heats up

The annual Tokyo Game Show, which takes place at the end of September each year, provides a useful barometer of the industry's health in its spiritual homeland. It was revealing then, that this year's show saw fewer publishers present on the show floor than ever before, with some companies having to combine resources to share a booth in order to have any presence at the show. The fact that most publishers were offering little more than an update on their E3 line-ups also demonstrates the displacement of the major focus of the videogame industry away from Japan and towards the US. Still the number of visitors was up to 150,000 from 134,000 last year, owing in part to growing numbers of attendees from South Korea and China, and Japanese gamers keen to see the games for themselves.

"In total, 140 of the top 200 titles at the show were sequels, remakes, budget versions or licences based on historical series"



There were few original titles at the show, with many publishers relying on existing IP, such as SNK Playmore and Capcom, who both announced updates to their classic beat 'em ups

In what is now a familiar trend, much of the product on display demonstrated a reliance on sequels and remakes, highlighting a worrying dearth of original ideas. In total, 140 of the top 200 titles at the show were sequels, remakes, budget versions or licences based on historical series, leaving very little room for the original titles that future sequels will rely on. Nevertheless, there were a handful of new titles on display. Vivendi attracted a surprising amount of attention for a western publisher, demonstrating *Red Ninja: End of Honor* at the New Otani Hotel. Square Enix meanwhile was showing off the likes of *Fullmetal Alchemist*, a manga tie-in, and *Metal Junk*, a PC online action game. Sammy's *Spy Fiction* was looking promising, as was From Software's *Echo Night Nebula*, the latest sci-fi flavoured episode of its horror adventure series, shown alongside *Armored Core Nexus* and *Kuon*, an action title set in 12th century Japan. Microsoft's *Phantom Dust* and *Magatama* were both looking solidly entertaining, but hardly enough to inspire an increase in hardware sales, while there was little new information about *True Fantasy Live Online* (sparking the rumour that Level 5's priority is with *Dragon Quest VIII*).

One major emphasis at the show was towards online gaming, with both Microsoft and Sony pushing their platforms to take the major share of a market many observers continue to see as a potentially lucrative one. This generation of hardware looks unlikely to kickstart the revolution: Xbox Live has done little to increase Japanese interest in Xbox, and PS2 BB, launched in May, has also met with little success. For the moment, the PS2 BB community is growing by a constant rate of 1,000 to 1,500 new users each month, mainly to play *Final Fantasy XI*. In total around 240,000 people are online with the PlayStation2, which is a similar size to Sega's Dreamcast *Phantasy Star Online* community a few years ago.

Nevertheless, games with some sort of online component were ubiquitous. There was, of course, the Korean contingent of PC online titles, such as *Lineage II*, which haven't yet succeeded in extending beyond a niche appeal in Japan thus far. Elsewhere though, Bandai's UniversalCentury.net *Gundam Online* looked more likely to attain massmarket appeal, leveraging the massive popularity of the *Gundam* licence in a bid for a decisive entry into the MMRPG market – though it won't be complete for another couple of years. The most active company on the online front was Square Enix. *Final Fantasy XI* is set to benefit from additional updates and connectivity with mobile phones, while new titles *Ambrosia Odyssey* and *Front Mission Online* are scheduled for a 2004 release. The company is also continuing the activities of Enix in other Asian markets, with *Cross Gate* attracting 10 million users across Taiwan and China at the end of August.

New hardware

Elsewhere, mobile phone games were also numerous, though consumer interest appears to be tailing off. Still, Square Enix intends to release the original *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Quest* on NTT Docomo's coming new generation of FOMA mobile phones. Nokia's N-Gage was conspicuous by its absence, as was Sony's PSP, which is expected at next year's E3, with software to





Sony's *EyeToy* led the charge for simple, accessible games at the show, with many other publishers following in pursuit of what is perceived as a potential growth market. The game has been a massive success for SCE since its Japanese launch earlier this year









Although attendance increased compared to last year, the amount of floorspace occupied seemed much smaller, indicating that Japanese publishers are currently entrenching themselves in preparation for the launch of Sony's PSP and a possible successor to GBA from Nintendo next year

follow at the next TGS. Rumours were circulating suggesting a November 2004 release date for Sony's handheld, and a price tag of ¥15,800 (£90). Other rumours, however, concerned a possible update of Nintendo's Game Boy Advance to coincide with SCEI's PSP launch, which could kick off a major battle for dominance of the handheld sector. Nintendo's new device will allegedly supporting an 8cm CD or DVD format instead of the current cartridge system.

Regarding Nintendo, although the company was absent from the show floor as usual, the company's CEO, Satoru Iwata, delivered an hour-long speech in which he aired two major product announcements. The first is a wireless communication adapter module for the GBA, obviating the need for a link cable. The device will be bundled with *Pokémon Fire Red* and *Leaf Green* for ¥4,800 (£30), and uses a Motorola chip, instead of existing Wi-Fi and Bluetooth technologies, since, Iwata-san argued, these are limited in range and dependent on hotspots. The second item is a new console exclusively designed for the Chinese market. With rampant software piracy reducing the profitability in the region, the iQue will be a low tech, low cost (498 Yuan, £35) console that will debut in October. The device is shaped like a larger N64 controller with a slot at its front to take a 64Mb memory card. Games will be localised versions of Super Famicom and Nintendo 64 software, downloaded onto the memory card for 48 Yuan (£3.50) each and, in a bid to limit piracy, the games will only run on an official memory card. Nintendo also plans to fund local Chinese developers in order to develop the Chinese game industry.

One other noticeable vogue at the show was towards accessible software and hardware – following the huge success of the *EyeToy*, and similar devices. *EyeToy* was an instant hit in Japan when it launched recently, as was the Kenshin *Dragon Quest* toy, which relies on a similar motion-capture principle and has sold 600,000 copies since its launch. Both products appeal to gamers who simply don't have the necessary time to enjoy long, complex, involving and highly technical games; a demographic identified by a number of publishers – not least Nintendo – as an area of potential growth. Consequently there were a number of derivative titles on display, the most entertaining being Namco's *Katamari Damashi* (see **E**128).

In spite of such titles, this year's TGS was undoubtedly a disappointment in terms of new offerings, suffering from the fact that most publishers are undergoing a process of restructuring; marshalling their resources for future outlets such as online gaming and the next generation of handheld and console hardware. Still, it's good news for the quality of next year's show.





Microsoft had some impressive software on display, but still failed to capture the attention of the wider Japanese public

X03 falls flat

There was sun, sea and shrimp at Microsoft's lavish X03 party, but little in the way of actual news



After the last two annual European Xbox events, Microsoft has gained a reputation for holding the best parties; it has also been pretty good at making big announcements to justify them. X03, held on a secluded beach in Antibes, got the first part right, but singularly failed with the latter. Unfortunately, X03 will be remembered for what didn't happen rather than what did. No *Perfect Dark Zero*, no playable *Halo 2*, nothing on a remodelled Xbox, no major game announcements.

With little in the way of news, X03 felt like a back-slapping exercise rather than a forum for disclosing headline-grabbing announcements. The press conference was held on the evening of September 16 and speakers included Eduardo Rossini, regional vice president, emphasising the growing Xbox portfolio; Michel Cassius, senior director, typically belligerent about the success of Xbox Live; Peter Moore, corporate vice president of worldwide retail sales and marketing, revelling in the fact Xbox is now in second place to PS2; and Ed Fries, corporate vice president of games publishing, reiterating the previous speakers' points, but with greater charisma.

In between the sloganeering there were some bulletins: Epic Games has signed a deal to bring titles exclusively to Xbox; six new European countries have been added to the Xbox Live service (Austria, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Norway and Switzerland); and Microsoft has adjusted its brand positioning with the tag-line "it's good to play together" (each speaker made sure they mentioned this at least three times). Peter Molyneux and Simon Carter also made an appearance to showcase a playable *Fable* (see page 48) in preparation for the roundtable questions to come on the following day. The orators took nearly two hours to air their messages but most of it felt like padding.

With the formalities over, Microsoft

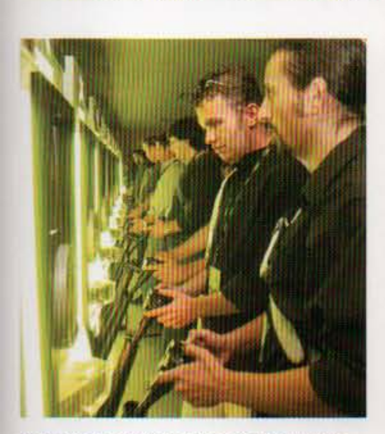
"The only major highlight of the day was an ebulent Tomonobu Itagaki, who demonstrated his much anticiapated Ninja Gaiden"



Over 1,000 guests were invited to the secluded Antibes beach for X03 where Microsoft provided succulent food and as much alcohol as journalists could stomach. No big announcements were made and many opted for an early night hoping that they'd get more out of day two...



"Convergence" was the word of the day in Ed Fries' upbeat, if hollow, speech



There were plenty of games to sample but nearly all had been showcased at E3 in May

treated over 1,000 guests to the usual mix of good food, copious amounts of alcohol and music. But while **Edge** gorged itself on the succulent spit-roast pig, swilled down with one or two beverages, the DJ set, by Daddy G of Massive Attack, was lacklustre. Indeed, though the coastal venue afforded a splendid view of the French Riviera skyline, the openess of the beach was hardly conducive to a close-knit party atmosphere. In an enclosed tent, pods were available for guests to sample games such as *Grabbed by the Ghoulies* (p41), *Top Spin* and *Amped 2* (p49), but for most the party ended early when buses began leaving at 11pm.

Day two offered a mixture of roundtable meetings, a "developer unplugged" forum and a retailer session. Yet these events overlapped, leaving participants with too many bases to cover in the available time. The only major highlight of the day was an ebullient Tomonobu Itagaki, who demonstrated his much anticipated *Ninja Gaiden* during Team Ninja's developer unplugged session (p34).

In particular, it was frustrating to find so many developers reluctant to talk about their wares. During roundtable interviews Bungie was willing to emphatically state that *Halo 2* would be better than the original, but could not reveal anything new in terms of gameplay details (that only one new image was released to the gathered press said it all). Meanwhile, Ken Lobb, Microsoft's studio manager and Rare's representative, talked enthusiastically about *Grabbed by the Ghoulies* and *Kameo: Elements of Power* but was unwilling to say anything about *Perfect Dark Zero*. Codemasters released information about its new title, *Race Driver 2: The Ultimate Driving Simulator*, but it was scant compensation.

At its closing presentation, Microsoft continued to bang its online drum, boasting that it now had some 500,000 Xbox Live subscribers worldwide. But the numbers failed to impress, especially in light of Microsoft's claim back in 2003 that it could generate 10 million subscribers in five years' time. This was a figure Ed Fries later denied knowledge of when **Edge** quizzed him.

X03 was a lavish event by any standards, but while retailers could come away impressed by the breadth and depth of Xbox software, the lack of new game announcements can only be seen as a concern. Whatever the case, Microsoft has set a poor precedent for X04, should anyone want to go for news gathering, rather than pig-scoffing purposes.







The all-new screenshot of *Halo 2* (top) clearly showing a new Elite weapon. *Top Spin* (left) and *RalliSport Challenge 2* (right) were two games Microsoft wanted to shout about at the event

X03 highlights

Epic Games' exclusive deal to create Xbox content

Xbox Live rolling out into six new countries

More than 100 playable Xbox games

The Inaugural Xbox Live Clash of the Continents competition

Prize for X03 Technical Achievemeant Award: *Ninja Gaiden* (Team Ninja)

Prize for X03 Innovation Award: *Fable* (Big Blue Box)

Prize for X03 Game of Show: *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3* (Ubisoft)

CUTTINGS



Half-Life source code stolen

It hasn't been a good month for Valve Software, or fans of *Half-Life 2* who will now have to wait until some time next year to get their hands on one of the most eagerly awaited PC titles ever. First Valve was forced to push back the game's release date from September to Christmas. Worse was to follow, however, when it was discovered that the game's source code had leaked onto the internet, complete with physics engine and, according to some reports, pieces of code relating to Steam, Valve's proprietary digital distribution system.

Vivendi reported that about a third of game had leaked, with Valve's **Gabe Newell** reporting the leak on the halflife2.net forums: "Ever have one of those weeks? This has just not been the best couple of days for me or for Valve. Yes, the source code that has been posted is the *HL-2* source code." Apparently the source was obtained by an external hacker, who had managed to install keystroke recorders on several machines at Valve. Newell went on to request the help of the *Half-Life* fan community in tracking down the source of the leak, requesting that anyone with any information forward it to helpvalve@valvesoftware.com. A Vivendi spokesman was unable to confirm the game's new release date, but it is expected to ship some time around April.

More bad news for UK developers

This month's casualties of the current malaise surrounding independent development were *Battle Engine Aquila* developer Lost Toys, which closed its doors, and *Malice* creator Argonaut, which announced an annual loss of £10.9 million. Guildford-based Lost Toys, which had planned to update Geoff Crammond's *Stunt Car Racer*, was forced to cease development on existing projects, making the company's entire staff redundant. Argonaut meanwhile has been hit by the failure to sign titles such as *Malice* and *Orchid*, though the company's balance sheet remains in a strong position. The one piece of good news concerning the UK game development scene was that, as expected, *Conflict: Desert Storm* developer Pivotal has been acquired by publisher SCi.

Northern Exposure

Scotland's annual Dare to be Digital student program has brought forth another fine crop of projects





Lost Box (above) won the prize for the greatest innovation and creativity award for its PC-based roleplaying game, *Demon Lore*. Winners of the £2,000 Dare to the Digital prize for the project with the greatest market potential was Team Brick (top). Its *ZooCrew* puzzle game features a humorous mix of playable animal characters and is reminiscent of some of DMA's earlier games

The grandees of Dundee has long viewed videogames as a creative industry to be encouraged. Dundee is, after all, the birthplace of *Lemmings* and *GTA*, and there are still plenty of developers in the area. Dave Jones current concern, Real Time Worlds is hidden away in a third storey office block, while VIS, Denki, Simian and Visual Science are sited less than a mile away.

September saw the emergence of the next batch of local hopefuls, thanks to the annual Dare to be Digital awards. Organised through the University of Abertay Dundee, and supported by local companies, the council and Dundee's local enterprise organisation, Scottish Enterprise Tayside, the awards are open to all students studying at Scottish universities. Teams accepted into the program are provided with office space, equipment and advice over a ten-week period during the summer to work on a digital media project.

This year, seven teams battled it out for the two main £2,000 prizes and the chance to further their project through a six-month placement via the University's incubator, Embreonix. Since the competition was launched in 2000, five new companies have been founded by Dare to be Digital teams. The 2003 projects ranged from traditional PC and console-style games to an educational Japanese language experience, a persistent mobile football management game and an animated children's TV series.

Chosen by a panel of industry insiders, the winners of the project with the greatest market potential was Team Brick's *ZooCrew*. Characteristic of some of the more wacky games once conjured up at DMA, this console-style platformer-puzzler mixes the different attributes of animals in a humorous way.

"Seven teams battled it out for the two main £2,000 prizes and the chance to further their project through a six-month placement"

"Our next step is talking to developers about how we can take the concept further," said Team Brick's project leader **Steve McGreal**. One obstacle however is that most of the development team still have another year before graduation. "It's probably a good thing in a way," McGreal reckoned. "Everyone keeps warning me how long it takes to get a deal."





The winner of the greatest innovation and creativity award was won by Lost Box's *Demon Lore*, a PC-based roleplaying game. The team's sole artist, Sarah Deas, won the personal achievement award. The competition also welcomed an international team from Malaysia. Universities across the country ran their own version of Dare to be Digital with the winning team, visiting Dundee for the final week of the Scottish competition.

"The standard of entries was incredible," commented **Richard Leinfellner**, EA's vice president of production and one of the judges. "What we saw was remarkable, the standards were universally high and picking the winners was extremely difficult. I can see Dare to be Digital making a major impact in the global games industry in the near future."

Amusement Machine Show is no laugh

Sammy shows off Dreamcast-based coin-op technology at another disappointing JAMMA show

As in previous years, the Amusement Machine Show 2003 gave little sign of any future recovery in the fortunes of a sector that, **Edge** is now tired of reporting, is still mired in the doldrums. Nevertheless, with the coin-op industry currently being vacated by large swathes of publishers, it does create room for those companies who are still active in the sector.

While Sega has been the major beneficiary of an open market and the dominant force in the past couple of years, surprisingly it was eclipsed at this year's show by Sammy. With the company's core Pachinko and Pachislo operations in terminal decline, its bid to demonstrate the seriousness of its ambition to become a major coin-op player consisted of the airing of its new Atomiswave board, based on Dreamcast technology.



Neither elaborate cabinets nor low cost boards have buoyed the coin-op sector

Though the company's firstparty Atomiswave efforts have failed to capture the imagination of arcade gamers, the device had a few high profile thirdparty titles to command attention at the show. Perhaps most significant is Playmore, now renamed as SNK Playmore. With the entry of Atomiswave into a shrinking market, the company has unsurprisingly decided to cease its efforts to create a successor to its Neo-Geo board, turning the page on one of the most glorious moments in videogame history. Its first title on Sammy's board is to be a new *King of Fighters*, which will, according to a SNK Playmore spokesman, make full use of 3D visuals and the network capabilities of the Atomiswave.

Another major company to commit to the Atomiswave is Capcom, which will be bringing out *Sammy vs Capcom* as the natural next step in its 'versus' series, marrying its own unparalleled history with *Guilty Gear*, currently the most popular 2D fighting game in the arcade.



OutRun2 (see p45) was the best game at the show, but no news yet of a home conversion

Aside from Sammy's new board though, the rest of the show was largely dominated by extant titles and sequels. The game of the show was undoubtedly a fully playable version of *OutRun2* that stood out on a Sega stand which otherwise focused on *Derby Owners*, *F-Zero AX* and its latest *Kart* racing game. Nevertheless, overall the show continues to disappoint, with no clear route to recovery.

Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Colin McRae Rally 04	Xbox/PS2	Codemasters	In-house	8
Homeworld 2	PC	Vivendi Universal	Relic Entertainment	8
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Xbox/GC/PS2/PC	Electronic Arts	In-house	8
Conflict: Desert Storm II	Xbox/PS2/GC/PC	SCi	Pivotal Games	7
Jak II: Renegade	PS2	SCEE	Naughty Dog	7
Magic Pengel: The Quest for Color	PS2	Agetec	Garakuta Studios	7
Pokemon Pinball: Ruby & Sapphire	GBA	Nintendo	Jupiter	7
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	Xbox	Ubisoft	Red Storm Entertainment	7
Tron 2.0	PC	Buena Vista Games	Monolith	6
Unlimited Saga	PS2	Square Enix	Squaresoft	6
Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior	PS2/PC	THQ	Kuju Entertainment	6
Chrome	PC	Gathering (Take 2 Interactive)	Techland	5
Pirates of the Caribbean	Xbox/PC	Disney Interactive/Ubisoft	Bethesda	5
XGRA: Extreme-G Racing Association	PS2/Xbox/GC	Acclaim	In-house	5
Alter Echo	Xbox/PS2	THQ	Outrage Games	4



Colin McRae Rally 04



Tiger Woods



Magic Pengel



Homeworld 2

CUTTINGS



Nintendo makes first ever loss

Nintendo recently announced that it is expecting its first interim loss since it was publicly listed in 1962. Having initially forecast a half-yearly profit of £81m, the company was forced to revise it down to a loss off £16m. Although it's tempting to attribute this deficit to the poor retail performance of the GameCube, the impact of its overseas cash reserves were probably more significant; the company lost about £220m on foreign currency transactions over the period owing to the rising value of the yen. Nevertheless, it's still bad news for the company, which also faces increased competition from Nokia and Sony in the handheld gaming market. There was some good news for Nintendo however, following a series of GameCube price cuts which saw the console go on sale in the UK at a price of £79 from October 10. In the week after a similar price cut in the US, the GameCube outsold both Xbox and PlayStation2, increasing its sales to 61,000 units from average sales of about 15,000. The impact of the UK price cut has yet to be disclosed as **Edge** goes to press.

Free games

In a novel bid to generate interest in its forthcoming title *Hidden and Dangerous 2*, publisher Gathering has released the original game as a freely available download. The original *Hidden and Dangerous* was released in 1999, receiving an **Edge** 9/10 review score in issue 73, and comes complete with the *Fight for Freedom* mission pack and mission editor. The game is available as a 264Mb download from www.gathering.com/hd2/hddeluxe.html Gathering isn't the only company to be giving away free games though; Revolution Software has also made its classic point-and-click adventure *Beneath a Steel Sky* available over the ScummVM virtual machine. The game is available from www.scummvm.org

www.simianindustries.co.uk
www.btexact.com

Release the smarts

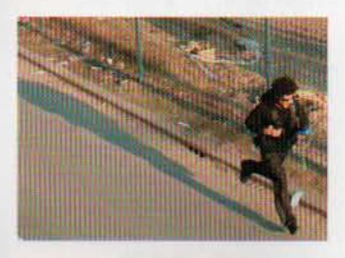
Simian Industries is creating a new style of game development tools, thanks to research from BT

Who is Uncle Roy?

Hosted at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London during June, 'Uncle Roy All Around You' was an interactive event mixing realworld participants with virtual helpers thanks to Smart Content technology. Organised by art grouping Blast Theory, together with Nottingham University's Mixed Reality Laboratory and BT Exact, the objective was for the online players, who saw a virtual representation of London, to help the connected street players to find a particular location, known as the Office. Together they searched for clues, communicating by audio and text messages.

BT Exact designed interface components for the fixed and mobile devices used by the players, including a 3D virtual world navigated by online players, and an interactive PDA interface for the street players. These interfaces allowed players to see each other's virtual and real locations while deciding what their next moves should be.







The players of 'Uncle Roy All Around You' may appear to be more suited to the pages of 'i-D' magazine than Edge but the innovative interactive event demonstrated the potential flexibility of the Smart Content concept

Smart Content sounds like the kind of buzzword tossed around the members-only clubs of Soho with careless abandon. In this case however there's something behind the facade.

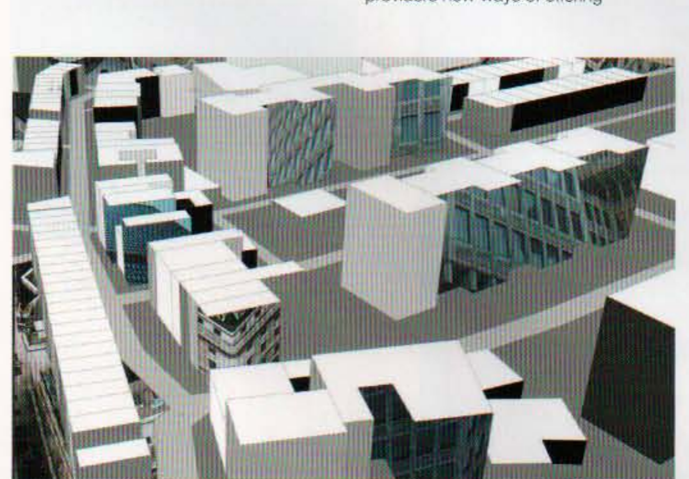
Created by BT's R&D arm, BT Exact, the concept of Smart Content was developed to give content providers new ways of offering device-independent experiences. Already in use in the video-editing market, the system was also used in the interactive multi-location event, 'Uncle Roy All Around You' (see Who is Uncle Roy?). Now it's the turn of traditional gaming. Dundee-based Simian Industries is in charge of turning Smart Content into something useful for hardnosed game developers.

"Smart Content is a completely new concept," explains managing director **Mark Ettle**. "Compared to current middleware, which is limited on a platform-technology level, this separates technology from the game. It will allow smaller devices to take advantage of other platform strengths." By comparison to existing tech, he says it will operate more like a realtime version of digital asset management system alienbrain than RenderWare.

"What we're concentrating on is features that give developers a huge amount of control over their data," Ettle continues. "This isn't something that has been done before in game development so it may take people a while to realise what they can get out of the tools." One example of this new approach will be the ability to allow users to personalise their gaming experience. By authoring content with this in mind, developers could allow users to alter characters and or even generate levels as they see fit.

"Smart Content is exactly what it says," says Ettle. "The content has enough information about relationships, constraints and linkages that it can be used to explore and express the set of information that describes how a game works. It enhances the abilities of traditional game development to cope with detailed complexity, while enabling players to interact with the game in a much more user-friendly way."

Another area being explored is inter-device connectivity. "It's not vital to the overall concept," says Ettle. "Games can be standalone or networked, although allowing multiple device types such as consoles, phones and PCs to talk to each other and compete will, of course, open up new possibilities." Simian, which has a strong relationship with the 3 phone network, is also looking into the possibility of streaming Smart Content data across 3G networks.



While the cool-looking street players of 'Uncle Roy All Around You' were running around the streets of London, the less comely were tucked away in the comfort of their own homes, aiding the quest thanks to this virtual representation

www.kaydara.com

And 3D for all

The latest version of Kaydara's Motionbuilder animation package is designed to be the Photoshop for 3D content users

File formats don't often rank high on the list of red-hot gaming technology, but according to Kaydara's CEO **Michel Besner**, they're crucial. Certainly the company's FBX file format has proved to be one of its most important assets.

Labelled the universal file interchange format, at least by Besner, FBX came about through Kaydara's expertise in handling motion capture data. Notoriously dirty, quality-wise, not only does mocap data often require a lot of cleaning up and post-process reconstruction, it also needs to be made available for conversion into a wide range of animation packages.

FBX, a wrapper which orders 3D data in such a way it can read by other animation and modelling software, was created as the solution to that problem. Now supporting the major animation packages as well as accepting data from motion caption, camera tracking and 3D scanning systems, it plays a major role in Kaydara's latest animation and visualisation software release, Motionbuilder 5.

"Our goal with Motionbuilder 5 is to do for 3D content creation what Photoshop did for 2D," explains Besner. "The focus isn't on technology. It's on developing a product that makes it easy for everyone to handle 3D."

FBX allows users to import and export objects as varied as objects, animations, textures, cameras, lights, motions, skeletons or even complete 3D scene files. Motionbuilder supports this with an internal clipart library that provides characters, environments, textures and animations to ensure users can get started quickly.

"Clipart and other freely available artwork was crucial for Photoshop users," Besner says. "Very few 2D artists create all their own work these days. They're getting hold of existing material and creating something new by integrating it with their own elements. That's exactly the sort of attitude we want to encourage with 3D content."

And when combined with Motionbuilder's realtime capacity – other animation software such as 3ds max, Maya or XSI are offline because of their modelling features – the power of the approach becomes apparent.

"The breakthrough features in Motionbuilder 5 are the story timeline tools," Besner enthuses. "They're ideal for developers wanting flexibility over their creative input for storyboards or even handling complete cut-scenes."

The story timeline combines different tracks, each of which can contain shots, animations, characters and camera data, as well as audio and video inputs. A suite of editing controls lets users work out their camera shots and timing separately from the animation timeline, providing flexibility for effects such as discontinuities and repeats. Other enhancements to make it easier to re-target animations between different character types and scales, while better rigging improves the interaction between models and constraints such as floors and walls.

The most surprising thing about Motionbuilder 5 is its price. True to Besner's stated aim, the prosumer version retails at a mere $995 (£598). In contrast, the similar full professional version costs $4,195 (£2,522). The difference is motion capture tools, an SDK and other extras including batch processing, integration with NXN's alienbrain asset management system and 12 months' support. "They're different markets," says Besner. "The prosumer wants features but developers require a service-driven process." The trick, of course, will be keeping both parties happy. Besner isn't worried though, "It's all about useability," he says. "That makes Motionbuilder 5 the ideal animation and storytelling tool for a broad range of artists."



Although most users tend to render cut-scenes created within Motionbuilder out to thirdparty renders, Kaydara has bulked up the package's internal OpenGL renderer to improve choice



The big new feature in Motionbuilder 5 is its story timeline tools which allow users to coordinate vast amounts of information within a single non-linear animation interface





Quadruped characters (top) are a notoriously tricky animation problem – it's another area that Kaydara has improved within Motionbuilder 5. Enhanced character animation functionality includes added support for hand floor constraints as well as finger, toe and neck controls

OUT THERE
REPORTAGE

01



Just some of the booty that Atari-obsessive Scott Evans salvaged when he visited the company's old offices



The Atari employee cafeteria. They must have rushed here en masse every lunchtime to play… erm, *Site 4*



Evans found dozens of boxes filled with PCBs. What aged delights lurk within? Not more *Site 4s* Edge hopes



Yes, that *is* a *Star Wars* cabinet in mint condition. Surely the arc of the covenant for Atari geek boys

02



Viewtiful Joe artist Yuko Ichimura somehow brings style and class to professional Essex girl, Jodie Marsh…



…and surgically 'enhanced' glamour goblin Jordan. Surely the least likely PR campaign of the year

01 Look!! V V V R@RE!!!!

US: Scott Evans collects Atari memorabilia. Not like *Stuntman* promos, or keyrings branded by Bruno Bonnell; like prototype arcade machines from the days when Atari meant energy, like the sort of stuff that'll make you cry with nostalgia and envy. In May, hearing that Midway were moving out of a former Atari office in Milpitas, California, Scott stopped by to see what he could salvage. He found a lot of arcade machines there, sure – hey, who *doesn't* have a gold *Asteroids* cabinet these days? – but much, much more besides. Shelves of plastic crates filled with dusty boards, prototype controllers bundled next to them, master films for artwork and marquees rolled up in rubber bands like your old Take That posters. Then there's the documentation – binders full of information about every game Atari ever made, and some Top Secret stuff Scott promises to reveal at a later date. If they ever get round to making an *Indiana Jones* film about videogame collectors, this will be the money shot. "I was able to obtain and preserve the majority of what you see here," writes Scott on his website, provoking a mixture of relief and outright jealousy. See the annotated pictures under 'Atari Trip' on www.safestuff.com, and do take a look around the rest of the site, too. It's a magical reminder of what Atari should mean.

02 Viewtiful Joes: Jordan vs Jodie

UK: If you haven't followed the story so far, a quick recap. 'Glamour model' Jordan feels Essex lapdancer Jodie Marsh is intruding on her ever-so-classy territory, and calls her "Droopy". Jodie responds by writing 'REAL' across her breasts. Jordan responds to that response with something else, and Jodie pouts and responds, and the two tits-out terriers continue ad infinitum, snarling at each other and suckling on the publicity. There's only one way the dispute's going to end, of course. Slo-mo ultra-stylised kung-fu. As part of the PR campaign for Capcom's imminent *Viewtiful Joe*, artist Yuko Ichimura has rendered Jordan and Jodie in *Joe*'s glorious style, and in doing so she's achieved the impossible: the low-rent duo now look both interesting *and* attractive. Miaow!

Soundbytes

"The previously announced September 30th release date for *Half-Life 2* is being pushed back. We are currently targeting a holiday release, but do not have a specific 'in-store' date to share at this time. We will release that information as soon as we have confirmed a new date"
Valve's Doug Lombardi reveals the inevitable before The Disaster

"It was just a lucky coincidence, I guess"
The Dark Ages of Camelot player Richard Machado, on his decision to play the game the night his house burned down. All six members of his family escaped safely after Machado smelled smoke in the early hours of the morning and alerted them

"Police have confirmed they are searching for the culprits – but are unable to shed any light on the meaning of 'The Famicom'"
Church vandals left a Scottish church scarred with graffiti, and police bemused by its meaning. Detective inspector **Edge** recommends Google

Super Mario Karts

Japan: If **Edge** is a magazine composed of aspects of desire, than Out There is the love of tat. Stick some game branding on something and this section of the magazine'll go for it faster than a Mario Kart on mushrooms. And that all-too-neat segue leads us to these miniature plastic versions of Mario and Yoshi. Both characters are embedded in high performance clockwork vehicles, although there's none of last year's Bit CharG technology here. The wind-up cars sit in tiny slots on the oval track, and go round and round until their potential energy matches the friction beneath their wheels. And then they stop, so **Edge** picks them up again, and watches them go round and round, and then they stop, and so on, and **Edge**'s blank eyes mist over, kleptomaniac soul still burning for the next bit of craptacular gaming kitsch.

Sugar Sugar Kandy Pop

US: Device convergence can have both positive and negative aspects, and the joy of bringing two incompatible utilities together can often cloud the vision of the designer – see Mr. Nagoshi's column this month for more details. Sometimes, though, convergence can be uniformly positive, and so it is with the Glucoboy, a glucose meter for diabetics that can be inserted into the Game Boy Advance, and rewards good sugar control with simple videogames. **Edge** has to confess that its medical knowledge isn't what it once was, so excuse the verbatim use of press release. "With the patient being responsible for so much of proper diabetes management the GLUCOBOY® carries an essential dual role, providing accurate medical diagnosis for the disease as well as an incentive delivery platform which serves as a key portal for obtaining patient-critical medical data," it says here. Well, quite. But the real point it that it encourages kids to check their levels regularly, clearly a positive thing. More information at www.diabetesincontrol.com/issue173/np.shtml

A Triforce of Links

Japan: **Edge** is retiring. A life of lazy luxury awaits. Along with swords, bombs and a whole heart piece (der-ner-ner-NER!) Yujin's *Wind Waker* figure set contains 36 whole rupees which **Edge** intends to invest at the dog track asap. You'll get a cheery Link, an anxious Link and a constipated Link plus sister Aryll and pirate Tetra, and each swivels their eyes as you turn their heads. The detail is perfect – Aryll comes with a microscopic seagull sticker and Tetra is the same disturbing colour as she is in the game.

Data Stream 'Media-related injuries' Special*

Number of cinema-related injuries reported from December 2001-December 2002 in Liverpool large casualty department: **42 (choking, back sprain, car crashes [when leaving])**

Number of PC-related injuries: **10 (tripping on wires, tenosynovitis)**

Number of console-related injuries: **0**

Number of letters in the longest name of a muscle: **32 (levator labii superiosis aleque nasi [upper lip muscle])**

Number of muscles used to play a PC game (assuming player is sat upright at a desk): **184**

Number of muscles used to play a console game (assuming player is slouched in a chair): **164**

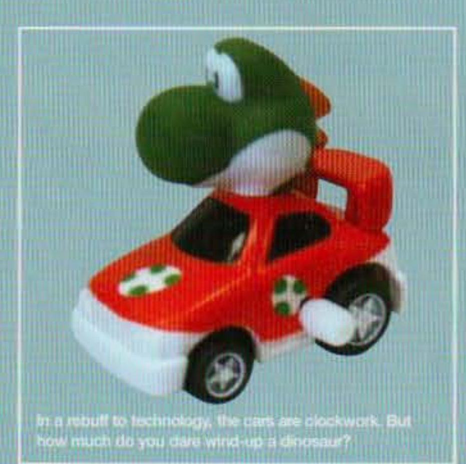
*Media-related injury figures provided by Dr Richard Evans



Yes, Edge has been shopping in Japan again. This time it's come back with 'Mario and Yoshi Slot Racing'



Sadly, the LCD timer in the centre isn't real. They're saving that for 'Mario and Yoshi Slot Racing Deluxe'



In a rebuff to technology, the cars are clockwork. But how much do you dare wind-up a dinosaur?





Already sold out from many J-tat shops, eBay or a trip to Japan may be your best bet for getting hold of these







06



At the weekends Edge lives in a Banana Splits-style house racing cars and watching anime DVDs all day



Imagery, such as this, fills the head and makes the late hours and Scandanavian press releases seem trifling



Japanese robot and panty DVDs are a bit of an aquired taste, but Edge is willing to try anything twice



The ADV 'Zone of the Enders' DVD is available from all good retailers. It's worth getting for the box blurb alone

07

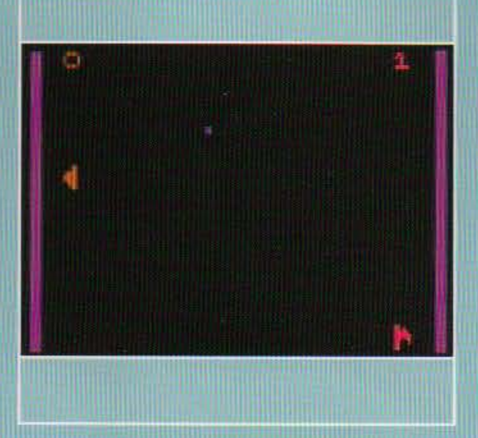


Cramming so much fun into 4k is admirable, but can it beat typing '55378008' into an upside down calculator?



Vic 20 owners unite. This *Rogue* clone is just two decades too late to save the powerhouse system



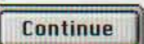


06 Good ADV Vice

UK: Those who find their taste for LEVs unsated by the PAL release of 'Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner' will want to check out ADV's latest 'ZOE' DVD, which comprises episodes 15-18 of the Japanese anime. "A new assault been launched! Just who are the sharp young pilots of these hot new LEVs?" the DVD asks. **Edge** isn't sure, and – such are the plotlines of these things – it isn't sure it'll *ever* be sure of anything, except that yes, these are indeed some hot new LEVs. The second part of mecha-anime-turned-videogame 'RahXephon' also receives a release, as do episodes 1-4 of the brilliantly named 'Full Metal Panic!'. But, to be honest, it was one of the other DVDs in the pack that caught **Edge**'s eye. "Roses are red," begins the blurb on the 'Colourful' box, "Violets are blue. This show's about panties." Hurray!

07 Code Warriors

US: The object of the 2003 MiniGame Compo is to produce a game. That bit's simple enough, obviously, just ask any number of developers reading this. So, to make it a bit harder, the object is to produce a game for an 8bit system of your choice; C64, Spectrum, Vectrex, NES, whatever. And because that still isn't hard enough, the code has to be tiny; 4k for the larger category, 1k for the ridiculously hardcore slimline version. Entries so far include a 1k *Rogue* clone for the Vic 20, a *Theme Park* clone for the Spectrum, one game for the Atari 2600 in which you play a SCSI hard drive and one which is billed as *Joust* meets *Pong*, and the C64's *Djihad Chess*, which is like chess, but… with bombs. By the time you read this, voting will have concluded, but do go look at http://starbase.globalpc.net/minigame/ for the winner and the runners up.



Winter
After summer's release drought, gaming looks good again…
GameCube price cut
But will it bring gamers running, or cause consumer panic?
Pseuds corner
Finally, **Edge** makes it into 'Private Eye'

Quit

Tetsuya Mizuguchi quits Sega
UGA's frontman leaves the Excitement Company
Grabbed by the Ghoulies
Like a THQ cartoon license, without the license
Microsoft Japan
Has no time to talk to the western press about *True Fantasy Live Online*



08 Millennium People

JG Ballard is fascinated by Heathrow airport. Like an ever spreading cancer across the English countryside, its bipolar presence – in part both malevolent and benevolent – has been a background to many of his books. The current resurgence of airborne terrorism places it in the centre of his latest, 'Millennium People'. A bomb placed in the baggage arrivals lounge explodes killing three people. Unclaimed by any group, it seems to trigger a summer of unrest. A cat breeders' show in Olympia, a travel agency in Shepherd's Bush, a video store in Twickenham are all targeted by a shadowy group. It's only when the National Film Theatre is firebombed, and a campaign of mortgage non-payment breaks out in a staunchly middleclass Chelsea estate that wider implications become apparent. With his ex-wife one of the Heathrow victims, psychologist David Markham tries to infiltrate the group. Part observer, part accomplice, he becomes a cipher for Ballard's highlighting of the growing stresses building within the middleclasses. The question he seems to be asking is: can fears over housing prices and rising council tax, combined with a breakdown in political trust and the loss of core community values, be offset by case of good chardonnay and the occasional wife-swapping thrill? And if not, what would be the outcome if the thin fabric of western civilisation cracked? Of course, as the good futurist he is, Ballard isn't so interested in providing the answers as posing the questions: but it certainly makes 'Millennium People' a thoughtful read.

09 Coalescent

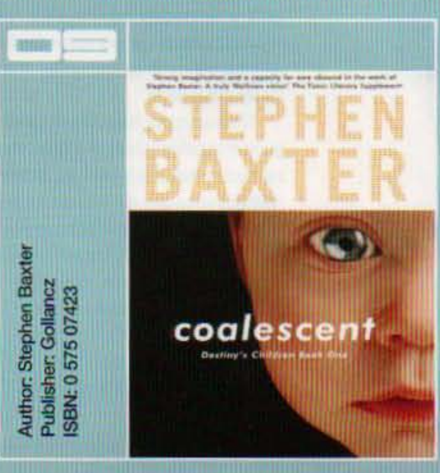
What is it about the verbosity of sci-fi writers? Often it seems as if they're seeking to overwhelm the reader with the sheer paper weight of their vision, even as the book is picked off the shelf. Not to be outdone, to that characteristic Stephen Baxter has added fecundity. Happy to deliver huge tomes on a sub-yearly basis, it's a mark of his readability that so many fans are prepared to keep up to date with his output. 'Coalescent' – the debut of a planned 'Destiny's Child' trilogy – will certainly keep them on their toes. Inspired in part by his previous book 'Evolution', which lorded over the lineage of the human race as a matriarchy, 'Coalescent', too, focuses on the power of the reproductive urge for shaping society. Starting in the fragmentation of Roman Britain, it's a multi-threaded romp through history and beyond, which flits from character to ancestor. Baxter's talent has always been meshing big themes of science with the drive of the individual to achieve, and 'Coalescent' is a fine example. It's perhaps ironic though, that in the character of George Poole, confused middle-age IT manager, that Baxter has found his most-rounded foil. In the world controlled by ambitious women, Poole sits as a slightly comic everyman. It's a shame that he's unlikely to feature in the future books. But as a measure of Baxter's growing talent as a writer, he demonstrates the potential of books two and three. Better catch 'Coalescent' quickly before the next one's due.

08



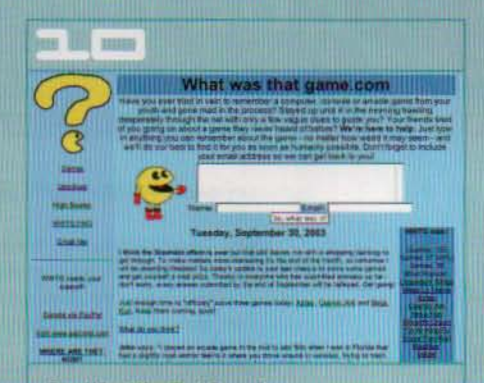
Author: JG Ballard
Publisher: Flamingo
ISBN: 0 00 225848 X

09



Author: Stephen Baxter
Publisher: Gollancz
ISBN: 0 575 07423

10



Site: **What Was That Game?**
URL: **www.whatwasthatgame.com**

10 Website of the month

"I was on holiday in Spain. I think it was called *Pootin' and Bootin'*" recalls one of **Edge**'s acquaintances of a mystery arcade machine. "Or something. And there was a cat. No, *two* cats. And you had to… avoid apples. Or catch them. And a wolf? A wolf. Or a pig. No, definitely a wolf. Maybe." She trails off into nostalgia, and **Edge** works out what she's talking about – *Pooyan*, isn't it? – using its big game brain. But if it hadn't, it'd be able to go to this website, which aims to use the power of the internet community to turn hazy reminiscence into hard fact. "There was also Mario on skateboards," continues **Edge**'s pal. Hmm. If you say so.

11 Advertainment

Japan: It's *Minna no Golf Online*. Yes, again. But this one features four 'salarymen' enjoying their business stay at a Japanese ryokan. So it's different, see?



"So, you're really planning to go to Amami Oshima [sunny island near Okinawa]?" asks one.



Yep, I'm planning to start farming after my retirement,' comes the reply. "That's cool," says another.



"Yes, it's a great plan indeed."
"Yeah, I've wanted to do that for years."



"Okay, but right now let's show them. Go on."
"Oh yes, I nearly forgot."



"What, online?"
"Heehee, yes online!"



"So even if we are far from each other, we can still meet up and play a round!"



Traditional Okinawa music plays. Voiceover: *"Minna no Golf… Online."*

If the internet didn't exist, the gaming climate would be very different. RedEye isn't talking about online gaming, a nascent thrill which currently limits you to interacting with the hardcore, exactly the sort of people RedEye doesn't really want to interact with for reasons that should be (or will become) obvious. Nor is he referring to the web games that grow in sophistication by the day, although their influence on gaming's ever-morphing shape will start to show over the next five years or so. He is referring to the way communication – and community – affects the industry, and in particular the reception afforded to even the most excellent of games.

RedEye's partner suggested this week that it would be wonderful if him and his three **Edge** co-columnists shared a house together. Perfect sitcom material. Just imagine! Biffo would crayon heavily pixellated lunatic catchphrases on the wall, Steven would smoke a pipe and produce perspicacious commentary like a super-intelligent soundbyte factory, Nagoshi would have whisky on his cornflakes, and RedEye would stalk around the house wearing a mask. In one episode, Nagoshi and RedEye would wake up in bed together. It would be the episode immediately after *F-Zero* hits the stores.

Goddamn, what RedEye wouldn't do to the *Monkey Ball* mentor after that, regardless of his morals and fidelity. *F-Zero GX* is the perfect child of Nintendo and Sega, the co-development title screen the stuff of April fools only half a decade ago. The specific qualities each party has brought to the development are unclear; it's like seeing the child of two similar parents, and being able to pick out genetic traits that could belong to either mum or dad. Maybe it's Nagoshi 'doing' Nintendo, or maybe *F-Zero GX* felt that Miyamoto touch. Either way, it is polished and whole, exactly the sort of game that RedEye thought he'd be getting regularly when he got his Cube, and the sort that has only irregularly arrived.

It is a game RedEye has played so much that it has broken him a little. He is no longer able to use his computer for long periods of time, because when he does the taskbar becomes a horizon and he starts to zone into the screen, the monitor warping left and right with each twitch of his head. Shake and it stops, but it is disconcerting for sure, and that's why this column is written in the local park on a spiral-bound notepad, to be transcribed at a future date, hopefully on a machine without a taskbar. Incidentally, this notepad is not fitted with Microsoft Messenger or Internet Explorer, which is why this column is getting written. The internet can be a ruinous place.

Back on topic. Said internet brings hardcore gamers together in exclusive clubs, forums centred on their major interests, perhaps a specific format or a genre or even a single game. When news that Nagoshi was developing *F-Zero GX* hit the internet, fans began a nine-month period of salivation. Every screenshot was analysed on a per-pixel basis, every bit of information leaked from Sega mulled over with desperation, trying to intone more details from pre-release materials whitewashed and sanitised by so many levels of translation and PR. Foreplay, foreplay, foreplay.



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Making some use of the internet

Orgasm. Except these communities are so wrapped up in their microscopic universes that they don't concentrate on what the game achieves, but focus instead on what it lacks. They spend less time playing the game they've lusted after for so long than they do dissecting its perceived inadequacies with people they've never met. Forums are filled with people who have seen it all before, each striving to outdo each other with knowledge of what this particular game lacks, backseat game designers making facile comparisons with previous iterations. RedEye doesn't really know or care how badly this game sits next to *F-Zero X*, because it is absolutely incredible in the here and now. He is loving it, loving every minute of it because there is so very much to love about it – every second of vertigo, every piece of Klein bottle track design, every infinitesimal distance he loses a race by – that no amount of bullying will stop.

If the internet didn't exist, you'd receive a few snapshots of the game in development. Enough to whet your appetite, perhaps, enough to mention to friends with similar interests. Maybe some of them would share your enthusiasm – maybe some would be skeptical – but there'd never be the sheer weight of opinion that seeps from every pore of the internet, where bullies shout loudly and act with incredulity when you can't see that They Are Right. On release players would delight in solitude for a while, discovering nuances for themselves without having them wrecked by me-first braggarts. There'd be at least a month before news of the snaking trick would leak out into magazine cheat pages, by which time many players would have discovered it for themselves, and decided to either incorporate it into their strategy, or issue a self-chastising moral statement banning the snake as a go-faster tactic.

A few columns ago RedEye pointed out that as much as Nagoshi puts into *F-Zero GX* it's still going to be rudimentarily the same game as racing games always have been – left, right, and a big Go Faster button. Everything else is just camouflage, and *F-Zero GX*'s camo is the fastest, shiniest, most beautiful he's ever seen. But RedEye never really got into the SNES or N64 versions. The cynics have seen *F-Zero* twice before – they've seen everything before, haven't they? – and maybe that's part of the problem. This is prettier and wider and fractionally different, and they want something completely different or something exactly the same. In that case, RedEye suggests they go out and buy a BioWare RPG, or play the old versions of *F-Zero* and grin from ear to ear like it was yesterday.

"There is a difference between a flawed game and one that isn't what you wanted. You are not RedEye; you don't have perfect taste"

But whatever they do, RedEye would like them to stop trying to pick apart games whose magnificence should be cause for celebration. There is a difference between a flawed game and one that isn't what you wanted. You are not RedEye; you don't have perfect taste. So, homework for this month? Find a game you've always been ashamed to like, visit your favourite insular fanbitch forum, and tell someone on the internet exactly why their opinion doesn't matter.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*

Somewhere, plans are probably afoot to produce the world's first videogame based on a book by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. That great writer's 'The Brothers Karamazov', a searing study of crime, love and religion – one of the greatest novels of all time – seems just the thing to lend some arthouse respectability to one's PS2 product line. Imagine the potential for a truly interactive exploration of timeless, deeply human issues through modern cutting-edge entertainment technology. Then forget what you have imagined, because *The Brothers Karamazov: Psyches At War* (as it will be called once the marketing department decides that some kind of vaguely evocative subtitle is needed) will be a platform game. First help Dmitri to murder his evil father, beat up a fellow soldier and jump around collecting roubles to give to his girlfriend! Then control Alyosha in the gloomy monastery, learning

experience of book and game was very close to a true 'interactive fiction'. Submerged in this revolutionary experience for weeks, the boy must at some point have marvelled at what kind of new imaginative sorcery the technological developments of the coming years might bring.

Two decades later, the boy – who is, of course, me – starts playing another game called *The Hobbit*. This time Inevitable Entertainment's big budget cartoon-styled interpretation is for the 128bit consoles. And what do you know, it turns out to be essentially a platform game. I rack my brains trying to remember where Tolkien devotes pages to detailed descriptions of Bilbo Baggins carefully jumping across series upon series of perilous ledges... In order to appeal to a pre-teen audience, moreover, *The Hobbit* now stars a Bilbo who is suspiciously childlike, rather than the middle-aged, reluctant adventurer of the novel.

could have been produced, only dressed in the kind of impoverished 'Dungeons & Dragons'-inspired mythology seemingly beloved of programmers the world over.

But this is hardly a unique sin among videogame 'translations' of works in other media: it is the general rule. *The Hobbit* becomes a tale of more or less repetitive jumping and slashing; *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* becomes a faux-surreal firstperson platformer. Squeezing a pre-existing media IP into a videogame format is more likely to work, of course, when the source is a film, since it is already a visual medium. Peter Jackson had already done the hard work of adapting 'The Lord of the Rings' for the screen when the *Two Towers* videogame came along and so effectively insinuated the player into the cinematic action. And I have fond memories of *Cobra*, a risible Sylvester Stallone vehicle which



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Let's talk about text

his chops from the old sage Father Zossima and jumping around collecting the pages of an ancient religious text! And thrill to hand-drawn cut scenes narrated by Sean Connery in a supposedly Russian accent! Nice.

Now flash back nearly 21 years to the Christmas of 1982, when a small boy has just received a copy of *The Hobbit* to run on his ZX Spectrum. It's a text adventure, but what is relatively new and exciting for that genre is that almost every location also has a graphic depiction. Watching each picture draw itself, line by line, over what seems like minutes, becomes strangely hypnotic, especially as the stark, jagged art style is so evocative. The laconic poetry of the location descriptions heightens the atmosphere: "You are in a small and dank dungeon buried far under the mountain." And you can even talk to the other characters in functional if not sophisticated ways: "TELL GANDALF 'BREAK DOOR'," for example.

This boy's particular copy of *The Hobbit* – programmed, let us remember, by one man, Philip Mitchell – came in a large-format presentation box along with a copy of Tolkien's novel, so that the boy was able to read the book alongside his exploration of the game, scanning Tolkien's prose for clues as how to proceed in the game, or letting the game's stylised art inform his imagination of scenes in the novel. In a sense the simultaneous

Now, it may seem unfair to beat an admittedly polished and competent modern videogame with the stick of an old, slightly buggy text adventure that fitted into 48k and that no one in their right minds would actually want to play all the way through today. And I'm not criticising Inevitable for taking liberties with the text of its source material.

became a rather good platform-shooter on the Spectrum. But adapting books became a creatively losing proposition as soon as the text adventure had breathed its commercial last. The 1982 *The Hobbit* had the huge advantage over its new sibling that it used the same material as its source: words.

"Squeezing a pre-existing media IP into a game format is more likely to work when the source is a film, since it is already a visual medium"

But somehow it's still disappointing to see 20 years' worth of possible evolution vanish in smoke. This new *Hobbit* game has far more in common with other videogames, such as *Ocarina of Time* (to which it pays careful and repeated homage – or, to put it another way, from which it nicks lots of ideas) than it does with the novel. And it has some nice touches, such as the *Wario Ware*-style lock-picking minigames, but we've seen it all before.

Instead of using and abusing its literary source material to invent a new, weird and wonderful kind of videogame, the developer has taken the book and unceremoniously forced it into a videogame-shaped jar that could equally be tied to another money-spinning intellectual property. That's the real problem: you feel that this doesn't *need* to be 'The Hobbit'. If the guardians of Tolkien's copyright had refused to play ball, exactly the same game

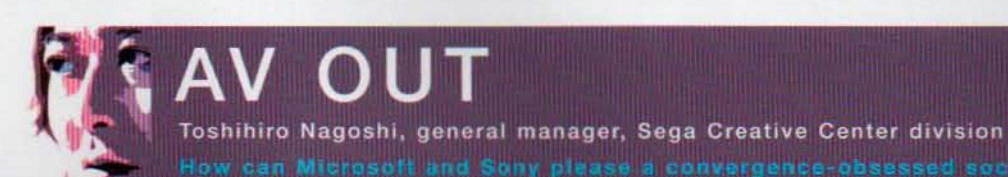
Last time I looked, however, it was a free country, and developers will doubtless continue to make games from books. Surely some day a genius designer will create something unforeseen and truly astonishing by working in this way? But in the meantime, if all you're going to do is to produce another ho-hum multiplatform blockbuster with cut-scenes and a voiceover to really, like, involve the player emotionally in the timeless story of this classic work of literature, then it's probably best that you stick to those authors who are safely dead. That way, at least there will be no anguished reprisals from those whose babies have been so thoroughly betrayed.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: steven_poole@mac.com

The next generation of consoles is starting to occupy more of my thoughts. Of course, the most intriguing prospect is the PlayStation3, then Xbox2 and whatever the 'GC2' will be called. But, I have the feeling deep inside me, a sadness that there isn't any Sega hardware on the list. If you could listen to my thoughts, you'd hear them sigh, and say, wistfully, "I almost forgot that we abandoned our hardware business." It's a sad feeling, filling my heart as I write these lines. But we are still very active in the arcade, so... in a way, we are still in the hardware business, right?

Still, you'll agree that if Sega was announcing a new piece of console hardware right now, that would be quite a topic for this column right? Well, what a coincidence! Here is THE big news! With regards to the next generation of home video game consoles, Sega is indeed just about to...





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, general manager, Sega Creative Center division

How can Microsoft and Sony please a convergence-obsessed society?

Hey, you almost believed it, didn't you? I'm just kidding. But I have to admit that this kind of sudden announcement wouldn't exactly be out of character for the company. It's the sort of thing it has done in the past.

So anyway, the next-generation consoles. What kind of design will they have? What kind of features? I guess we are all very interested in these topics. But one thing is certain. Most of the features that the companies will add will have no relation to videogames. To illustrate this, let's take the example of the mobile phones in Japan. Here, the mobile phone has experienced such a dramatic, dynamic and fast evolution in the last couple of years that it becomes what I would call a 'Key Station'. Sure, with your mobile phones you can call other people, but this is just a minor feature compared to the very popular email feature, and compared to the ability to take high megapixel pictures, and compared to the way you can film smooth high-resolution video! And have you heard the quality of the sound these days – not the transmission quality, but the playback on audio files? Incredible! My mobile phone is a true multimedia station; it can handle bank transfers, true 3D games, and internet access. I can use the infrared port on my mobile phone to pay for things at numerous vending machines throughout Tokyo, or even use it as a remote control to change the channel of my TV set. To be honest, although this convergence seems crazy, I've tried these features and I have to admit it is very useful. And once you've come to accept that you have a device, a Key Station, from which you can access and control everything, it starts to become useful in your everyday life.

Perhaps we'll get convergence between phones and consoles, too. Does that mean that the same mobile phone that does everything I've mentioned will also end up driving the PS3 directly? Or will that task be given to the PSP, the new portable from SCEI, announced only a few months ago? Perhaps it'll be like the Game Boy Advance and GameCube, where we need to buy an optional extension for the console in order to communicate with the handheld. Whatever, whether it's the PSP or mobile phone, I have a feeling that such a move with the PS3 is not out of the question. Don't you have the feeling that things are becoming less about pure videogames, and more about home electronics?

In which case, what about Xbox2? For Microsoft, Windows' brand recognition is strong and well respected. It follows that if Sony has a home electronic approach, it would be natural for Microsoft to take a computer approach. Does that make sense? To me it's just logic. It is natural for both companies to perform in the area they know best, and neither Sony nor Microsoft have a background in videogames. They come from outside, and the development of their respective consoles may well be influenced by what they fundamentally are. I hope it is.

"Don't you have the feeling that things are becoming less about pure videogames and more about home electronics?"

Because if it is, there will be a very definite concept behind each console, and users will have no problem making a choice between them. A choice between the heritage of Sony and Microsoft will make things easy. Even so, we are at a time when the value of single, separate things is fading. People just don't see things with a high value as before, because there are simply too many items around them. They want many of these things at the same time – convergence. And to design a new object in such an environment is difficult, especially when you have to tell people that what you are making is great, both in terms of importance but mostly in terms of value. Let's get back to my example, the mobile phone. In Japan, the specifications of the camera, like the number of pixels for its CCD, and the size of its onboard memory, have a tremendous impact on the sales rankings of mobile phones, especially true with female users. It's all so strange. I mean it's just a phone, right? What matters is that you can dial, answer, speak, and hear, right?

Of course, it is supply and demand, so we have no one to blame but ourselves. You hear people at feedback sessions, "I would like this kind of feature, and this one as well and..." But in the end, they rarely take full advantage of them, because they quickly realise these features aren't as convenient as they'd imagined, or that they're difficult to use. This reasoning is so common, even from the mouths of the people who required these features so badly. Just have a look on the web, full of tons of sadistic comments from people who inspired the features in the first place. We are living in incredible times indeed. And in such a harsh environment, it is more interesting than ever to see how each maker is going to design and bring their console to light. I'm very excited about it all.

Then again, at the beginning of this column, I told you I was sad that we'd stopped our console hardware developments. And I said that we were still making consoles, but I was joking. Because if we were, I could not be writing about my forecasts for other makers' soon-to-come, next-generation consoles. Saying that makes me feel much better! And, as someone who shared the very same preoccupation not so long ago, I want to express my sincere support to them. See you!

Prior to Sega's recent restructuring, Toshihiro Nagoshi was president of Amusement Vision

Here's a funny thing; I've not seen either of the 'Tomb Raider' films, or the 'Resident Evil' movie. Or any game-related movie tie-in since the risible 'Super Mario Bros'. In fact, I haven't left my living room for four years, except once when I was chased down the street by what I thought was the ghost of a bear, but it turned out to be nothing more than my own shadow. Oh, how foolish I felt when I turned a corner only for the ghost bear to have somehow got ahead of me, and then… then a cloud passed across the sun.

That aside, chances are I won't go and see 'Resident Evil 2', or 'The House of the Dead' movies either. Or 'Crazy Taxi', or any game-related movie at all, for the rest of my life. Why? Because, aside from the fact I've been banned from my local Cineplex for drawing walnuts on the screen with a marker pen, I just don't want to, man! However, although I've not seen any of the aforementioned films, lots of people pick out Ty the Tasmanian tiger from an identity parade (even if I couldn't), but only because her son has it on his GameCube. Show her a picture of Solid Snake, or Max Payne, or Master Chief, or Gordon Freeman – characters from some of the best games of the last few years – and you draw a blank. But in terms of additions to the gaming pantheon, Lara Croft remains the most recent and recognisable.

In the immediate aftermath of *Tomb Raider's* initial success there was the inevitable tidal wave of Croft-a-likes – some with swords, others in even smaller hotpants – none of whom was ever going to make a dent in the public consciousness. But since then, aside from the usual, tedious, carnival procession of sub-Sonic animal characters, it's as if the industry has given up on trying to find a new, and marketable, figurehead. Ironically, now that Microsoft is firmly ingrained with its Xbox, about the closest we get to a recognisable figure is Bill Gates. If this was minutiae of politics, and plot non-twists that only George Lucas gives a fig about. Or understands. Yeah, 'Attack of the Clones' looks pretty, but what the hell is going on!?

It's like *Tetris*, or *EyeToy* – they're just what they are. You don't need an instruction manual, or anything. This isn't to say every game should be simple – but why bother trying to create a recognisable and interesting character if you're going to give up halfway through the process, and for some bland and unappealing cat with a magic hoover? Marketing and PR will only get you so far.

It wouldn't be such a problem that Crofty is up there alone were it not for the fact that the *Tomb Raider* games are such flaccid sacks of hopelessness. Because of Lara, *Tomb Raider* is the first port of call for many casuals and newcomers, and when they get here they're confronted with unfinished, cynical dross like *Angel of Darkness*.



BIFFOVISION

Page 30, press hold, and reveal. 'Digitiser's founder speaks out

Isn't it about time Lara Croft was sacked as a videogame figurehead?

have, and consequently the *Tomb Raider* pretend woman has become even more firmly engrained as an ambassador of modern gaming. *The* ambassador of modern gaming. And Lucozade.

During a recent family gathering I cracked what I considered to be a nerdy fanboy joke, when I suggested that an overweight relation attend a forthcoming fancy dress gala as Lara Croft. The moment the words left my mouth I expected to be confronted with blank faces, and questions such as "Who is Lara Croft?" and "Why did you take your trousers off when you mentioned her?"

Instead – doubtless to the distress of said overweight relation – I was confronted with a barrage of hearty laughter, my cross-generational family members then taking turns to heap misery upon the poor girl by speculating that she would need a "pair of hotpants made out of a blimp", and have to be prised out of them at the end of the day by "four burly men working an oar".

This demonstrated to me not only that I hail from a family of merciless bastards, who care naught for the feelings of their overweight and insecure kin, but how disappointed I was that Lara Croft is still the sole recognisable figurehead for the entire gaming medium. Oh sure, stop an old woman in the street and she may know who Pac-Man is. Mario, Sonic – both also have a fair chance of being identified by passers-by. Admittedly, my special ladyfriend can the music industry, and we were at the height of Britpop, every band in the charts would be Shed 7.

Fair enough, it's not always easy to create an iconic character. Just ask George Lucas, who after 20 years and two tedious films has yet to imagine a 'Star Wars' villain to match Darth Vader. And in game terms, that character is ideally matched to a great game. The key to creating an enduring icon, and a game that can be played across the board, is simplicity on both counts. 'Simpsons' creator Matt Groening once remarked that when designing his characters he took a leaf out of Walt Disney's book and reduced them to basic shapes, which could be recognised in silhouette form.

Let's look at *Blinx: The Time Sweeper*. A clever game admittedly, if about as much fun to play as having your buttocks filled with concrete. But it was a complicated concept. Forward, and reverse, and sucking stuff up, and… y'know, okay. Not *that* complicated. But to anyone with only a cursory interest in games it was all a bit fiddly.

To go back to 'Star Wars' again for a minute, the original movies were more accessible, because they were simpler. 'The Phantom Menace' and 'Attack of the Clones' have been obsessed with the tedious

Yeah, it's hard to force a cult, or shoehorn an enduring icon, into the pop culture psyche-bowl. But much as music always needs a Beatles or a Stones, or a Blur or an Oasis, gaming is long overdue for a new equivalent. Games are better and more exciting than they've possibly ever been, but if you think Gordon Freeman, with his orange jumpsuit and glasses, or the spikey-haired but generic Jak (Daxter's mate), are ever going to make it onto the cover of 'Time' magazine, you're sadly deluded.

"A seven-year-old, slightly whiffy digital Indiana Jonesette and the CEO of Microsoft are the pubic face of the games industry"

It's a sorry state of affairs when a seven-year-old, slightly whiffy digital Indiana Jonesette and the CEO of Microsoft are the public face of the games industry. Here's my suggestion; what about a game starring a Christmas tree with massive breasts? It's identifiable as a silhouette, and the pendulous baps will keep the 14-year-old boys happy, and give girls something to aspire to. And just to make sure all bases are covered, it can be the billionaire head of an evil multinational corporation. And it's mysterious, and smokes cigarettes, and does good stealth. There you go; games industry saved.

Mr Biffo is a semi-retired videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge's***

Edge's most wanted

Mojib Ribbon

Just because we'll never play it or understand it doesn't stop **Edge** pining for this unexpectedly hip-hop follow up to the charms of Vib Ribbon.

(PlayStation2) SCEI



Onimusha 3

Capcom's stand at this year's Tokyo Game Show has certainly renewed **Edge**'s interest in the time travelling samurai antics of Jean Reno and friends.

(PlayStation2) Capcom



Macross: Super Dimension Fortress

The definitive big robot anime series, transformed into a videogame by Sega's AM2 team. **Edge**'s appetite is whetted. See next issue for more big robots.

(PlayStation2) Bandai



Ninja Gaiden

At X03 Tomonobu Itagaki laughed at a German who dared question his decision to include blood. The poor fellow might never play the uncensored version.

(Xbox) Tecmo



What a torture

The slow information drip of videogame PR

This might sound obvious, but there's a couple of differences between **Edge**'s testscreen and prescreen sections. It's worth spelling out though: a review attempts to offer a thorough, objective, critical analysis of a game's merits and to offer purchasing advice. Previews, on the other hand are written about games that aren't yet fully developed, in a bid to assess their potential merits. They're based on games that can arrive in varying degrees of completeness – from a few screenshots accompanying a press release to a playable version that's almost as complete as the finished product.

The extent to which games transform and metamorphose prior to release varies enormously. Who really knows, for example, whether Planet Moon will fix the flaws present in the playable preview version of *Armed & Dangerous*? Or whether the simplistic action in *Grabbed by the Ghoulies* will be wrapped up in a structure that elevates it beyond mediocre? Clearly it's a previewer's responsibility to make their best guess, but any critical – or praiseworthy – comment in a preview is implicitly qualified by the caveat that the game in question is unfinished.

For this reason, previews are open to PR abuse. First there's the repeated assurances that any problems will be fixed in time for review – which it's the previewer's job to see through. Next, and more problematic, there's the long, slow, orchestrated drip-feed of information that accompanies the most colourless title in a bid to build pre-review hype (and the number of preorders from retailers). In their attempt to obtain blanket coverage, publishers frequently attempt to show as little of their games as often as possible, from the earliest available opportunity.

They'll divvy up exclusive previews into 'first look', 'first playable', 'first cover render' and so on, before sharing them out among videogame magazines desperate to secure an advantage over their rivals on the newsstand. Recently, for example, **Edge** was invited on a trip to find out about the background story of a firstperson shooter that won't be out till well into next year. Nothing else, just the game's background story. **Edge** didn't bother attending. The problem with this long period of eking out is that it's difficult to maintain both a sense of objectivity and any enthusiasm, short changing both reader and developer. Which is why **Edge** only previews games about which there's something meaningful to say.













Ninja Gaiden

The arcade favourite returns at last, with gameplay able to match the sort of scintillating visuals you can expect from Team Ninja







Trap doors can plunge the hero down into hidden caves, but hopefully this will enhance exploration rather than prove to be an unexpected irritation

Edge got lucky. It wasn't because the magazine loved *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*; or that *Ninja Gaiden* had been on the 'most wanted' list more than once; or even anything to do with reputation. **Edge** got lucky because it sat at the head of the table right next to Tomonobu Itagaki during his round-table meeting at X03 (see p14). So when the game's creator asked if anyone would like to play, **Edge** didn't hesitate to offer its services.

Though only the first and third level of the game were playable it was a relief to see that *Ninja Gaiden* has coalesced into something greater than a few flashy FMV sequences interspersed with limp combat. Acting as a gentle tutorial, the first section of the game sees the hero, Ryu Hyabusa, infiltrating the domain of the evil Vigor Empire. Just as in the original *Ninja Gaiden* (1987) the hero can wall-leap several times to reach elevated locations. It's one of the first pieces of gymnastics the player learns and has been translated superbly into the third dimension.

Other moves include wall-running and the ability to backflip off walls – a technique that often sees you land behind an assailant, ready to deliver the killing blow. These ninja techniques are all simple to execute and give the combat a bouncy, joyful energy. But enemies also attack with startling speed and in large numbers; often they hurl shuriken, which can only be avoided with some incredibly nimble footwork. Strike an enemy down with a well timed katana attack and h[e] will be decapitated. As you might expect, Team Ninja has shown little restraint in terms of the amount of blood spilled during the incendiary fight sequences.

The player begins the game with five weapons, including the standard katana an[d] pair of nunchaku, and the ultimate goal of t[he] game is to retrieve the holy sword, Ryuken. Though the combat is frenzied, some tactic[al] depth is introduced when more varied and skilled enemies appear later in the game. Choosing the most potent weapon for the situation at hand is vital for success. And as [in] the previous *Ninja Gaiden* games, magic enhances Ryu's offensive abilities. Potions c[an] be discovered in chests which give him the ability to launch energy-sapping spells at

"As you might expect, Team Ninja has shown little restraint in terms of the amount of blood spilled during the incendiary fight sequences"

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Tecmo**
Developer: **In-house (Team Ninja)**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q4 (Japan), 2004 (UK)**

Previously in **E**112, **E**113, **E**125, **E**126













opponents, often wiping several out in one extravagant burst.

The only major flaw we noted was that the action is so fast that the camera often fails to keep up. When six opponents took **Edge** on in one room – some of them leaping in and out of view – the battle became too hectic for its own good. This difficulty was further compounded by the fact that the camera turns to face Ryu whenever he enters a new room, thus leaving him briefly vulnerable to unseen attacks. Yet Itagaki-san was dismissive of this problem, pointing out that he had a revolutionary camera system and more fine-tuning needed to be implemented.

As you'd expect from a team that brought us *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*, *Ninja Gaiden* is visually stunning. Interiors are richly detailed while exteriors afford beautiful views of distant landscapes and imperious architecture. **Edge** has only seen the human enemies in the game, though movie clips, screenshots and the series' history suggest that demoniacal beasts and modern vehicles of warfare will make a dramatic appearance.

There are bonuses too. These include the first three arcade versions of *Ninja Gaiden* which can be located and played on a dusty old arcade cabinet. Those with Xbox Live will also be able to download bonus content, though Itagaki-san would not be drawn on what this might be. Camera problems aside, *Ninja Gaiden* is likely to cement Team Ninja's reputation as a developer able to deliver games that play as beautifully as they look.





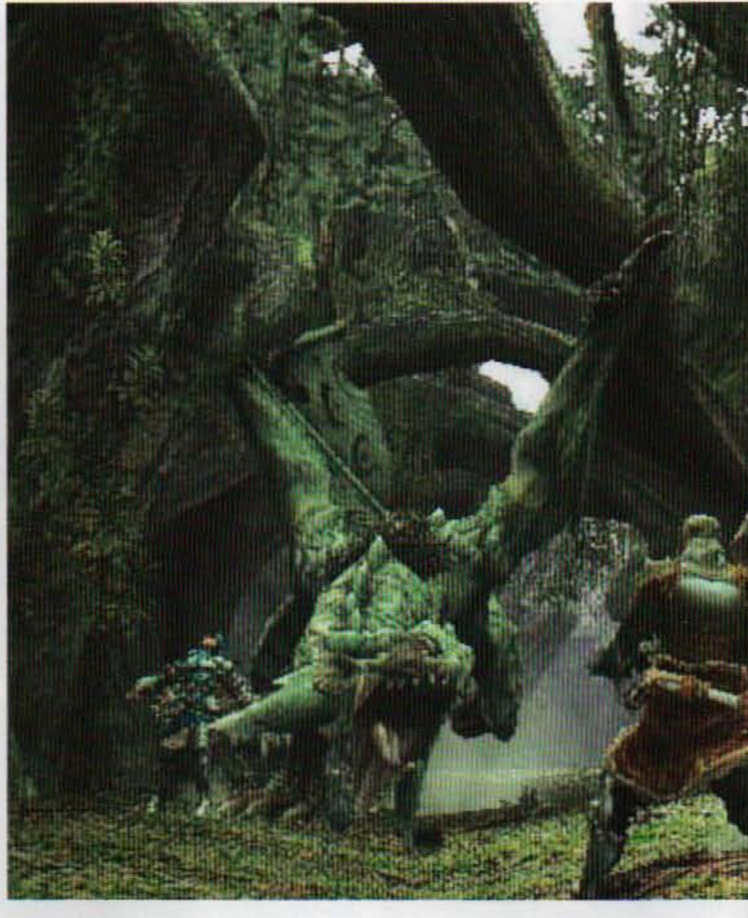
Enemies with guns are very dangerous indeed, but at least their bullets can be deflected with a defensive twist of the katana blade (left). The bloody violence ensures a mature rating worldwide

Monster Hunter

Edge goes big game hunting at Capcom and takes the chance to find out more about Europe's online prospects



After the kill, you can gather body parts to sell back in town. Talking to townspeople and other players will help you learn which are the most valuable and which can be combined into items and weapon upgrades



"Can I say it? *Please?*" **Edge** isn't used to its interviewees being quite so eager, but **Noritake Funamizu**, executive director, is literally bursting to explain his vision behind Capcom's new cooperative online game. "I wanted to make a 'Jurassic Park' you could really experience yourself. I wanted it to be very real for the player, but for it to have a fantastical element, which is where the dragons come in."

In *Monster Hunter*, there's no over-arching plot. Instead, up to eight players gather in town meeting rooms and chat before selecting a mission to embark on together. Hunting and battling the enormous creatures that roam the world will require coordination and forward planning, as some creatures need to be lured into the open, or trapped for a team slaughter. "At some point," says Funamizu-san ominously, "you'll face monsters you can't possibly kill alone."

"Network gaming is very limited right now, with only a few types of games. Outbreak and Monster Hunter open up a whole new category"



The missions are split over five game worlds, which Funamizu-san promises are much more expansive than those in *Phantasy Star Online*

And these monsters are far more than simple hatchet-fodder. The director enthuses, "I wanted them to feel like real creatures – real animals – so we've worked to make their movement very naturalistic. We've also written a high level of AI into their behaviour. When they're thirsty they'll look for water, when they're hungry they'll hunt each other – well, the carnivores will, and they're more likely to go after the grass eaters, just as they would in nature. And then there are other, intelligent animals who live among the monsters. In order to succeed in the game, you'll need to study each creature's habits and learn about them from townspeople."

Monsters, team combat and big swords normally add up to an RPG, but not in *Monster Hunter*. There's no levelling up here. Your power in the game grows through upgrading your weapons and armour. This might simply be a case of selling off the hides and meat from your kills to buy some new kit, or you might need to search out particular raw materials.

Although there will only be two main categories of weaponry – swords and projectiles – these will subdivide into dozens: hammers, lances, long bows and maces, to name but a few.

In order not to break the mood, communication between the players will be limited to menu-driven phrases and the PS2 keyboard. "There is a rhythm in the game," explains Funamizu-san, "You'll have peaceful moment followed by an intense battle, and then another peaceful moment. You might be walking around an empty, peaceful area and then suddenly a flying creature will spot you and attack."

The greatest challenge for the team is creating enough variety in the missions; "I really want to have a hundred missions, carefully designed to bring different experiences – although I don't know if we'll have them ready in time," says Funamizu-sa[n] "Some will be singleplayer, and perhaps in the course of completing them you will unlo[ck] a secret multiplayer mission. The game is very dynamic that way, very diversified."

Format: **PS2, Xbox, GC**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **TBC (Japan)**

Previously in **E**128











Customising your character forms a big part of *Monster Hunter*. When the game begins, you're completely naked – in terms of equipment at least. Your first mission should provide you with some leather armour and basic weaponry

But with PS2 online take-up slow in Japan, is there enough of a market for games like *Monster Hunter*? **Tsuyoshi Tanaka**, general manager at Capcom's Production Studio 1, is confident. "I think with the release of *Resident Evil Outbreak* enthusiasm is going to skyrocket. Network gaming is very limited right now, with only a few types of games – MMRPGs, strategy or FPS. *Outbreak* and *Monster Hunter* open up a whole new category." Funamizu-san elaborates: "Both games are set in worlds with no rigid rules. You can choose not to concern yourself with the mission and just wander around and have some fun. I think many newcomers to networking gaming will enjoy it."

The European picture is bleak by comparison. As things stand, Tanaka-san flatly quashes any hope of the game getting a PAL release: "Europe is not yet suitable for network gaming. It does not meet our minimum requirements for online play. While *Outbreak* could be released as an offline game, this isn't a possibility with *Monster Hunter*." Capcom is looking into the possibility of producing a PC conversion that would give European players a chance to play the game.

He is, however, still hopeful of finding a console solution. "Our partner in Japan, KDDI, provides us with a high quality network which allows the game to perform as it was designed to. If tomorrow we could find such a high quality partner in Europe, then everything would be possible." **Edge** hopes he's right. But you know what they say about tomorrow...

Killer 7

Nintendo hopes exclusive software will drive the Cube's sluggish sales. Could it be that Capcom has the Killer app?



"While making the game I've had to travel a lot between Tokyo and Osaka and seen many new faces, spoken to many new people," says Goichi Suda. "It is in this process that some of the game characters emerged"



The Keio Plaza Hotel in Shinjuku. **Edge** is here to talk about *Killer 7* with Capcom's **Kobayashi Horiyuki** and Grasshopper Manufacture director **Goichi Suda**. But Horiyuki-san, general manager of Production Studio 4, has something he'd like to talk about first...

"Ah, **Edge**. That score for *Dino Crisis 3*, three points? No, it's okay, there's no problem. It's just that when I went to ECTS everyone asked me what I thought of it. I replied, 'So what?' It's only personal opinion. We were very pleased – and surprised – that *Viewtiful Joe* got an award..." **Edge**, head

"I'm very proud of the travel system... It's like a racing game. You push the acceleration button so that your character speeds up"



It's not out yet, but Capcom has already had approaches to turn *Killer 7* into a movie

still firmly attached to body, moves swiftly on. So, *Killer 7*, then...

"We've not spoken about this before," reveals Horiyuki-san. "Indeed," confirms Suda-san, widely regarded as a maverick creator in his homeland: "It's not a soccer game or a pro-wrestling sim." So what is it? "It's an action adventure game" he says, coyly. "Be more specific," chastises Horiyuki-san. "Okay. The game is about a hitman. Well, seven hitmen confronting a common enemy called Heaven Smile, who is capable of changing shape by touching people. He's in the US, and the seven hitmen are dispatched to kill him."

This manifests itself as the hero having seven lives, as he can switch between the assassins at any point. To switch, he must first find a TV, where each of his forms corresponds to a channel. That setup – and the footage shown so far – implies a shooting game, but *Killer 7* is more than that. "You might get that idea because of the way we have shown the game so far, but it is very much an adventure game," says Horiyuki-san, before Suda-san interrupts: "But it does have the action element, where you shoot your enemies in realtime, not like an RPG with turn-based combat. All the hitmen have different weapons, so they offer different ways of enjoying the action. One has a sniper rifle, one a machine gun, one a rocket launcher..."

Which is an interesting aspect, but Capcom hopes that *Killer 7* will make its mark on videogaming through style as well as substance. "You know what?" asks Horiyuki-san, rhetorically. "I think that, on our own, Production Studio 4 couldn't deliver such a style of graphics. Mr Suda has an artistic vie[w] which is unmatched. You just can't find that i[n] any mainstream videogame company. I think [it] is remarkable – it's truly a designer's game. Even within the details, like the Japanese subtitles [*Killer 7*'s dialogue is in English], the fonts are coloured and animated. It's all done to make players feel more intense."

Suda-san, with some modesty, agrees. "[I] thought it was important because I have been given a chance by Mr Mikami to make a game for Capcom, so I had to make something different. If it's not different, the game won't get noticed. So I thought for a long time about how to make the experience unique and enjoyable while remaining differe[nt] from Capcom's traditional image."

While *Killer 7* is an adventure game,

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house (Production Studio 4)/Grasshopper Manufacture**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Spring 2004 (UK)**

Previously in **E**119









movement is not freeform, but confined to a single button that instructs the player to follow a path which regularly branches in different directions. "I'm very proud of the travel system inside the game," says Suda-san. "It's like a racing game. You push the acceleration button so that your character speeds up. When you arrive at a spot with a choice of directions, arrows appear and you just need to choose the direction where you want to go. The game camera and travel systems are two of the most important features of the game."

The goal is to locate an enemy which is also capable of changing form, using sound – specifically the enemy's laugh – as a guide. "Yes, you get frustrated hearing this enemy laughing at you!" exclaims Horiyuki-san with glee. When the player believes the enemy is close, they can trigger a battle sequence. "You can fire at will," points out Suda, "there's no ammo limitation. Well, you need to reload, but that's just to make the game better."

It's a violent game, and while Capcom believes there's no real issue with it sitting on shelves alongside, say, *Kirby's Air Ride*, questions were asked internally. "We were asked about the purpose of the game," says Horiyuki-san. "But we only had one critic, someone from Europe who asked us not to kill a Christian priest onscreen. Nintendo was not opposed, as I think it knew what our intentions were from our work on *Biohazard GC*."

The game was expected for Christmas, but during the interview Horiyuki-san hints that the release has dropped from the colder winter (end of 2003) to the warmer winter (start of 2004). But he doesn't seem to mind. "This game is special. It needs all the development time we can spare. If it didn't have that, it wouldn't be complete, and, well, you know..." He glances at **Edge**, and his dark eyes say 'three', the same look he started this interview with. "But it is going to be okay."



"It is very difficult to make a game with seven different heroes," admits Suda-san. "You have to build their controls and gameplay... In a way, we almost have seven different game engines running"

Grabbed by the Ghoulies

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Microsoft**
Developer: **Rare**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **November 14**

Previously in **E**125

Rare hopes its first big release since its move is less a case of 'y'know, for kids!', and more a case of 'y'know, for everyone!'

Pick-pocketing every spooky horror film every made, *Grabbed by the Ghoulies* kidnaps your girlfriend, traps you in a drafty mansion and pits you against the hyperactive forces of evil with only a well-mannered butler for company.

Each of the mansion's rooms forms a self-contained challenge; often the door will lock shut behind you and your health is reset up or down to a level appropriate to the difficulty of the task that awaits you. Clearing the room may be a case of the simple destruction of all the ghouls lurking in it, but later challenges require you to demolish one type of enemy but not another, or despatch a set number within a tight time limit. Should you break the rules, the Grim Reaper will glide in from the wings, and you must avoid his fizzing finger of death if you hope to escape the room alive. Periodically, the game takes control from you, switching to first person while you creep forward. When the inevitable scare hits, you must follow short combo prompts to survive.

Combat is controlled entirely through the right analogue stick. Although Cooper can deliver kicks, punches and impressive aerial body slams, you have no direct control over which he chooses. While it's an undeniably instinctive system, it does become more frustrating later in the game, once weapons are introduced. Differentiating between a directional tap for a melee attack, and a light push for a weapon attack can be almost impossible in the heat of battle, and can leave you accosting enemies with tiny dribbles of fire to which they are immune.

The presentation throughout is of an unparalleled high standard. From the animated comic pages which introduce the story to the sketched sepia of the map which unfolds from the menu, there is no area of the game which has not been lavished with care and imagination. Enemy design – both in their appearance and their animation – conveys more vivacity and character than many games manage with their hero, toon-shading adding a magnificent solidity. Skeletons who attack with too much fervour can lose an arm, which can be swiftly retrieved and used to club them about the head. Others, when they defeat you, do a little 'Timewarp' inspired hip thrust over your inert body.

There remain some tiny bugs, but on the whole *Grabbed by the Ghoulies* is in robust and impressive health. Only the full game will reveal whether Rare has been able to successfully overcome the game's potential to be bitty and repetitive.





Some enemies will turn on each other, giving you some peace and quiet to smash up whatever takes your fancy and hunt for hidden secrets. Others can only be killed in certain ways, such as setting them alight



Slapstick and tickle

The whole game is permeated with Rare's trademark humour. Toilets steam with a fetid haze, in-jokes lurk in hidden corners, and burps and farts abound. There is an absurd delight in the range of items you can grab – burgers, stuffed swordfish, and antique chairs all shatter by gratifying degrees as you pound and swing your way through the crowd. That said, pelting the dancing skeletons with an armful of bottles reminded **Edge** a little too much of a team night out...

Nina

Format: PlayStation
Publisher: Namc
Developer: In-hous
Origin: Japa
Release: 2004 (Japan), TBC (UK

With a theme tune two notes away from James Bond, and a name three letters away from Nikita, Tekken's Nina embarks on her own spying spree







Nina Williams's hair is imprinted into the minds of PlayStation owners the world over. The animation of those stringy strands was a revelation to gamers who had grown up with heroes for whom technical limitations had meant an unflattering rota of hats and pigtails. Those who paid attention to the plot as well as to the eye-candy will remember that when Nina turns up at the first *Tekken* tournament she has total amnesia. Namco's new adventure prequel looks set to fill in the blanks.

The story is a strange mixture of current paranoias and '70s Alistair Maclean movies. A shady alliance between the mafia and a group of terrorists lead the CIA to believe they are harbouring weapons of mass destruction. After they lose the group's trail they call on Nina – "the ultimate assassin" and her M16 partner, the impossibly plain-named Alan Smith. They track the terrorists to a vast ocean liner, whose deep pile carpets and





As well as twin swords, Nina can pull off some dramatic Dante-style double gun combinations

crystal chandeliers provide the perfect environment for a spot of sneaking and smashing. It's not yet clear how much Nina will be able to interact with the environments, but some sections of the ship have clearly been designed with platforming in mind.

With a control scheme similar to that of *Grabbed by the Ghoulies* (p41), Nina's attacks are all triggered by the right analogue stick. Hand to hand combat is sophisticated, however, as you might expect from a game sired by a beat 'em up. By combining movements Nina will perform combos and block attacks – something that becomes crucial as more weaponry becomes available to her. As well as twin katanas and swords, she's also able to use pistols and machine guns, and filling the combo bar triggers a special attack, which looks powerful enough to punch a man's heart clean through his ribs.

It's early days for *Nina*, but for now there's a jarring discrepancy between the in-game footage and the lavish FMV for which Namco is famous. Will Nina's mission take her from the liner on to other locations? Will Alan Smith be playable? Do the rumours of appearances by Nina's sister and Dr Boskonovitch have an foundation? Will the game really deliver "ten trillion tons of mayhem"? Since Namco currently won't, only time will tell.









You can't fault Namco's continuity monkey, although by the start of *Tekken 1*, Nina's purple jumpsuit had lost its arms and fetching legwarmers. The use of her character may attract beat 'em up loyalists to the adventure genre – the question is whether the combat will have enough depth and subtlety to satisfy them

Armed & Dangerous

Format: **Xbox, PC**
Publisher: **LucasArts/Activision**
Developer: **Planet Moon**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Spring 2004**

Previously in **E**125

Planet Moon's novel quirk 'em up needs tidying up before release if it's to live up to its potential

The arrival of a playable version of what was probably the most pleasant surprise at this year's E3 confirms the positive impressions given in Los Angeles. Which is to say that Planet Moon's latest bid for videogame idiosyncrasy is a quirky, original, intense, adrenaline-fuelled, hyperactive shooter that also happens to be pretty fun to play. Roman and his band of Lionhearts (Jonesy, Q1-11, and Rexus) are as eccentric as they were over at E3, on their quest to steal the Book of Rule from King Forge of Milola. But the game still has a few rough edges that need to be smoothed over if it's to make the leap from merely diverting to truly groundbreaking entertainment.

There are several obvious areas that need to be fixed before the game's release. The implementation of Roman's sidekicks, for example, currently feels slightly woolly, and presumably unfinished AI extends their eccentricity to a haphazard presence on the battlefield. Likewise, though enemy Grunts will need to be fairly stupid in the finished game if its emphasis on over-the-top combat against unfeasible hordes of enemies is going to work, at the moment they're a little too easily confused. Other areas to improve are the difficulty levels, which are a bit uneven, and crosshair sensitivity – at the moment, for anyone used to *Halo's* sweetspots, it's too oversensitive when lining up targets.

Planet Moon is hopefully already on the case with all of the above though, and there's certainly enough time for these changes to be made. The one area that probably won't have time to improve is the game's graphics, which is a shame because they're functional at best. More importantly, the game's rather murky feel makes it hard to work out what's going on at times, and difficult to distinguish Grunts from background decoration.

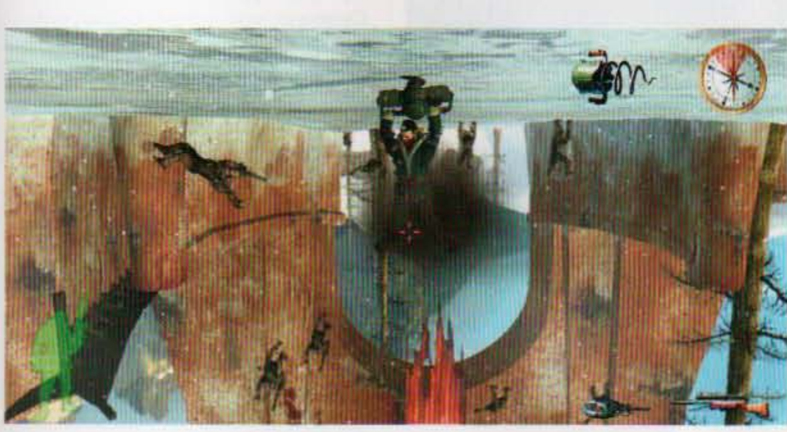
The one area that doesn't need any tweaking though is the core game mechanics. In spite of the unfinished bits outlined above, *Armed & Dangerous* is a joy to play, and the action is unremitting. Still, stopping off at the pub gives Roman the opportunity to take up new and ever more quirky weaponry, such as the Shark Gun. This provides the satisfying sight of enemy ranks decimated by a homing torpedo and a mash of teeth.















While the graphics are rather functional, at least scenery such as buildings and trees can be destroyed, taking nearby Grunts with them. The novel weapon selection includes the Topsy Turvy gun (above)

Castlevania: Lament of Innocence

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Konami
Developer: KCEJ
Origin: Japan
Release: November 11 (Japan), February (UK)

Previously in E125, E128

Konami's forthcoming update of the Belmont legend falls down on historical accuracy, but scores for franchise authenticity









The combat can feel a bit static, but *Castlevania* games have always been about more than just fighting, and the labyrinthine structure is superb







Elaborate boss battles are back, along with crosses, holy water and whips. Freudian dodginess aside, one introduction made in the PlayStation2 title is an increased emphasis on platform-style sections

Good combination

Unlike previous versions of *Castlevania*, the original Leon has combos at his disposal to cope with the all-round attacks of his enemies. Initially these are quite simple (two light attacks followed by a heavy attack, for example), but over the course of the game new 'skills' are unlocked that allow access to more elaborate button sequences with, predictably, more significant onscreen impact – such as aerial combos that prove particularly useful against floating eyeballs. It's hardly ground-breaking stuff, but combined with special weapons and magic attacks (charged up by blocking the special attacks of opponents), it lends a certain amount of strategic depth.

Since **Edge** last saw *Lament of Innocence*, back at E3, a few of the details that were unclear at the time have now been fixed. Like the camera... Instead of offering the possibility of limited manoeuvrability, as was suggested to **Edge** in Los Angeles, it's now totally fixed. Which, during play, does have a tendency to frustrate slightly, but it also facilitates the ornate interiors and gothic detail within the mansion that lend such atmosphere. Detail such as the lavishly patterned carpets or the portraits that adorn the walls – **Edge** will charitably assume that the Renaissance style paintings hanging in an 11th century setting are down to some sort of vampiric chronology-busting.

Indeed, historical accuracy is hardly the game's strong point, judging by the potted summary of 11th century Europe with which it commences. The opening cut-scene is rather flat and underwhelming, introducing players to the background narrative (Baron Leon Belmont renounces his title and status in order to rescue his betrothed from the clutches of a vampire, against the wishes of the Church), and to Rinaldo Gandolfini, a shopkeeper who keeps Leon in alchemical whips and high potions throughout the game. And then it's on to the first few rooms of the castle, which serve as a mini tutorial, introducing players to the double jump and a grappling technique which sees Leon swinging from his whip to access higher areas or cross chasms.

In truth, the game suffers slightly from a superficial similarity to the likes of *Devil May Cry*, since it doesn't have the same degree of action dynamism possessed by Dante. But this comparison is unfair because *Lament of Innocence* is a substantially different game: dig slightly deeper and the core values of the *Castlevania* series emerge, most noticeably the explorative focus and topographical exposition. Other Belmont regulars to reappear include Leon's arsenal of upgradeable whip and special weapons (cross, holy water, axe, etc), and castle denizens, such as bats, skeletons, zombies and heavy armour.

In fact, the only downside at the moment appears to be the unremitting church organ music. Granted, the tempo changes that coincide with encounters increase the urgency of the action, but it's all a bit unremitting. Fortunately though, that's **Edge**'s only reservation at this stage. Otherwise, the decision to apply the imaginations behind *Symphony of the Night* to three dimensions is shaping up superbly.

OutRun2



Format: **Arcade**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Sega-AM2**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Winter**

Previously in **E**127

Having spent several hours with a playable cabinet at the London Preview event, **Edge** can at last sleep soundly at night



Eight cars are now confirmed: Enzo, F50, 360 Spider, F40, Testarossa, 288 GTO, 365 GTS/4 Daytona and the Dino 246 GTS. Despite what you may have read elsewhere, there is still no word on a home conversion although **Edge** would lose all faith in Sega should this not happen

Not that **Edge** expected Sega-AM2 to get it wrong, you understand, but until you play, you never know. Disasters have happened before, of course.

But not this time. *OutRun2* is one of the most exhilarating coin-op drives **Edge** has had the pleasure to experience in the last few years. Select the Enzo, choose your BGM (modernised versions of the classic 'Splash Wave', 'Passing Breeze' and 'Magical Sound Shower' originals), cane it off the line and the moment you set the car into its first powerslide you're reminded of what makes Sega's best racing offerings so special. Everything feels beautifully intuitive – so very familiar and so very exciting – allowing you to comfortably hold your Ferrari in some of the most ridiculous drifts to date. It's probably Sega's most thrilling arcade car-based racer since *Daytona USA*. Yes, *that* important.

It's not the hardest of games, although the Heart Attack mode (which sets certain time-limited tasks for you to achieve) does extend longevity. Besides, this is about quality of the experience, not its quantity, and the immediacy of the game dynamic makes it perfect console fodder. Indeed, the prospect of an online multiplayer mode-enabled version for the living room remains near the very top of **Edge**'s Christmas wish list.





Trackside detail, while beautiful, still isn't up to the standard of the best PS2 or Xbox racer. But then it does shift past at an impressive rate...

Pop Idol

Format: **PS2, PC**
Publisher: **Codemasters**
Developer: **Hothouse Creations**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Out now**

Like the show, it will be consumed by millions, but can this videogame version ever hope to appeal to us indy kids?





Sadly, only Simon Cowell makes it to the judging panel. Though **Edge** doesn't mind losing Dr Fox's inanities, Pete Waterman's absence is criminal



As any wannabe will know, choosing the right outfit for the 'Pop Idol' grand final is crucial and can sway public opinion. **Edge** decided to go for the Korben look. We scored high on technique but failed miserably on presentation. Well, there's always next year. Or perhaps 'Fame Academy'...

"That used to be my favourite song, but not any more," etc. **Edge** is not ashamed to admit that it enjoys the bear pit that is 'Pop Idol'. Public humiliation is the best medicine for talentless celebrity seeking individuals with delusions of grandeur, says **Edge**'s mum. Yet it was always going to be difficult to translate the most compulsive aspect of the show to a game. And though the marketing blurb boasts of 10,000 putdowns and encouragements there's no room for extraordinary badness. That means no sheep-like ululations, no mumbling halfwits and no Glaswegian mentalist with ghetto blaster in tow.

What you do get is an insipid rythm action title with little energy and a constrained structure. Although we've only sampled the demo version, the main competition mode consists of an audition and a final. And that's it. Perhaps more rounds are included in the final release, but if not, the Party and Karaoke modes are unlikely to compensate.

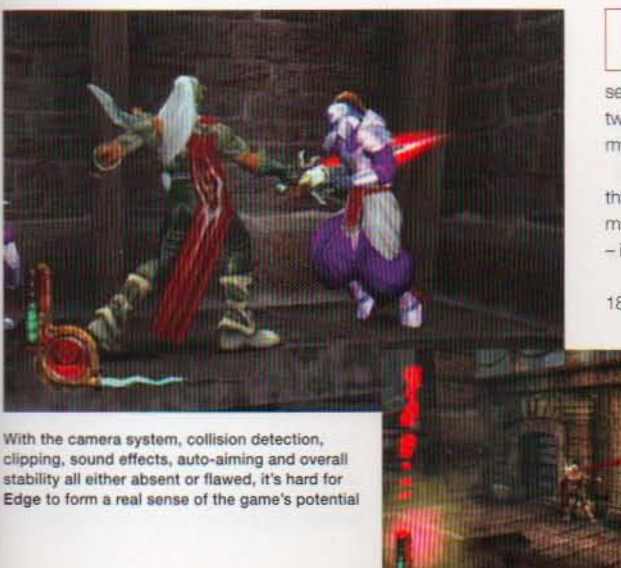
The mechanics are more akin to *Gitarooman* than *PaRappa* (with symbols converging to a centre point), but crucially it lacks that game's clever analogue stick input and as a result has little sophistication. **Edge** is very disappointed. As Pete Waterman might say, "What does it say on the sign, kid? Pop Idol." Sorry, you're not our Pop Idol.

Legacy of Kain: Defiance

Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Eidos**
Developer: **Crystal Dynamics**
Origin: **US**
Release: **November (UK)**

Previously in **E**125

Having taken custody of Lara, will Crystal Dynamics inherit the Angel of Darkness' flawed mantle?



With the camera system, collision detection, clipping, sound effects, auto-aiming and overall stability all either absent or flawed, it's hard for Edge to form a real sense of the game's potential

Edge is beginning to struggle with the intertwinings of Nosgoth's history, but what it can recall of Kain and Raziel's relationship is mostly concerned with lakes of fiery acid. It seems even a common enemy is not enough to heal the rift, and the two must fight their way through *Defiance* in order to uncover the mystery that binds their fates and their sequels together.

The hallmarks of the series are all present. Suffering an insatiable thirst for blood, the vampire anti-heroes hunt for a continual supply of manacled snacks. Combat – a mixture of sword combos and impalings – is enhanced as power-ups give the Reaver fire and lightning attacks.

The camera system – a fixed point from which you can pan nearly 180 degrees – is an inventive solution to balancing cinematic and practical considerations. But it's a very poor match for a combat style which relies on hurling enemies across the screen. And it's certainly not up to the challenge of code so buggy that **Edge** got stuck, in quick succession, under the floor, in a wall and behind a door.

In fact, the only aspect of the game currently beyond reproach is the voice acting. **Edge** sincerely hopes that the November release date on Eidos's schedule is a misprint.





Playing as Kain you can 'mist' through bars, windows and gates, allowing you access to areas which Raziel has to circumvent

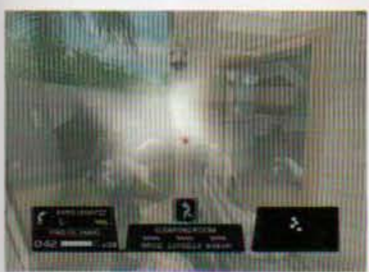
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Ubisoft**
Developer: **Red Storm**
Origin: **US**
Release: **November 14 (UK)**

Previously in **E**126

A team reliable enough to act as a force of one? More impressive Xbox special ops in the key of Clancy, proving that it takes four to counter-tango





The effect of a flashbang freezes your vision and dulls your ears for several seconds, raising a whole new raft of sly possibilities for Live combat



Here's the team, in typically intelligent formation, covering all of the most vulnerable angles and minimising the risk of friendly fire. A gratuitous grenade launcher is included, though, in case you feel the need to rampage during the closing seconds of a failed mission

This recent recipient of Game of the Show at Microsoft's X03 event (see p14) feels like it owes more to *Splinter Cell* than its PC namesake. This is *Tom Clancy's* console world: resplendent night and thermal vision, masterful shadows and convincing flapping from fabrics and other flexible objects. A world built for conspiracy, then, and now tactical special-ops.

You assume the role of team leader of a quartet of anti-terrorist operatives, allocating orders to the remaining trio who'll act as a single unit. But this ostensible lack of team-based strategy is offset by a number of things. Divulging movement orders is a simple case of pointing your crosshair at a location and pressing a single button, whereupon your squad will assume a surprisingly robust formation. We're yet to see any artificial stupidity, making them the boon they should be, and not a cross to bear.

Another button press will bring up a menu that allows more complex routines to be disclosed, such as clearing a room with a flash bang, and neutralising any threats contained within. It's another order that your guys can be prompted to obey only on your signal, literally – it's Live headset compatible, and spoken orders are available, allowing you to practice those gruff callsigns before you take them onto Xbox Live for real.

Fable

Format: Xbo
Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studio**
Developer: **Big Blue Bo**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **200**

Previously in **E**101, **E**106, **E**111, **E**117, **E**12

While it's still more potential than substance, Fable is finally beginning to emerge from the development mists



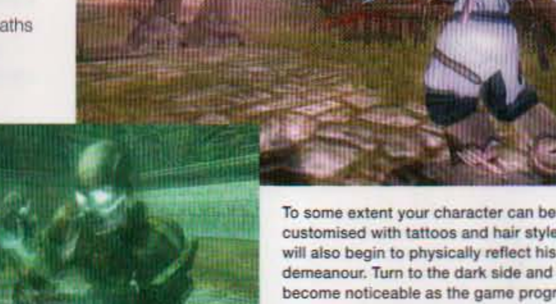


Players are given the same missions, but they can be tackled in two ways: protect the village from bandits or join forces with them, for instance

At X03 *Fable* was more a demonstration of the combat mechanics than anything else. Though it's always difficult to get a feel of how a game works while you're watching a ten-foot-tall screen from a distance, it didn't appear complex. Noticeably only one enemy engaged the protagonist while the others held back as if in a Bruce Lee film circa 1975. When hit, large red damage indicators floated above the heads of the aggressors. It all looked a bit basic, but this game was never going to be about slaying hoards of assailants.

The structure is still enticingly open-ended. A central narrative strand runs through the game but there will be plenty of diverging paths to ensure every player's experience is different. Peter Molyneux discussed some emergent potentialities, such as being able to marry into a rich family – and if you wanted – murdering your wife and father-in-law to pocket a sizeable inheritance. However, settling down to the blissful family life is only possible for a brief spell – Molyneux also hinted that tragedy would spur the player on to hit the quest trail again.

Edge suspects there's a long way to go before *Fable*'s design document becomes a living, breathing world of possibility, but it's still heartening to see a developer attempting to push the envelope.



To some extent your character can be customised with tattoos and hair styles, but he will also begin to physically reflect his moral demeanour. Turn to the dark side and it will become noticeable as the game progresses

BC

Format: Xbo
Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studio**
Developer: **Intrepid Game**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **200**

Previously in **E**111, **E**117, **E**12

Sophisticated game of follow the leader, or One Million Years BC sim? **Edge** checks out how Intrepid's savage world has evolved since its last look

It used to be the top of a hill, but now the goal of the game is to guide your tribe to a hidden valley full of prehistoric delights. Of course, when they get there it may turn out to be a cruel and inhospitable place, but it's the journey that counts.

A rushed demo was all we saw of the game at X03. The four minutes of footage was encouraging enough and proved to **Edge** that this is going to be more than *Chuck Rock* in 3D. Most impressive was the way the tribe members adapted to situations dependent on your actions. You can hunt dodo by hurling spears, but the more astute player will soon learn that injury can be avoided by rolling rocks down hills into them; your fellow Homo sapiens will soon follow the lead.

Expect the environments to alter radically along the way. Both winter conditions and a blisteringly hot desert must be traversed. A race of intelligent monkeys will also attempt to thwart the player at several stages through the game, but there was no sign of them in this demo. What we did see though, was an impressively modelled and animated 'baby' T-rex. It lumbered into view then decimated the tribe (apparently its mother makes an appearance later in the game). It was an enticing and frustratingly short presentation, but at least it left us wanting more.



Organising and teaching your tribe to pick up new skills is a vital gameplay component. But what happens when many tribespeople die is unknown





Slaying dinosaurs will clearly form the game's most dramatic moments. **Edge** is looking forward to tackling the most famous of them all

Amped 2

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **US**
Release: **November 14 (UK)**

Previously in **E**123, **E**125

Microsoft's criminally underrated snowboarding game returns, and offers players the chance to take their show-off skills online

Points are no longer allocated on the number of revolutions you can perform in the air. A graceful single spin with a perfect landing earns more points than a sloppy double

A key part of Microsoft's XSN online sports network, *Amped 2*'s multiplayer aspect – no racing, just several takes on out-tricking competitors, and a gentler, friendlier Freeride option – is one thing about the snowbound sequel that intrigues. Still, the online element, along with the longer runs, the bigger range of tricks, the added sophistication in linking them together; the epic emo soundtrack and the extreme sports styling; all of this is peripheral to the real make-or-break factor of a snowboarding game, the control. *Amped 2* retains *Amped*'s gentle, graceful arcs, and the tactile thrill of switching between deep, softly-shifting powder and fast compact snow.

Which isn't to say there haven't been tweaks. Railsides now include a balance meter that'll be familiar to *Tony Hawk* fans, as do hand plants. And *Amped 2*'s unstated ambition to become the snowy answer to Activision's franchise is underlined by the inclusion of 'snow skating', a cross between snowboarding and skateboarding which removes the board's feet bindings. That means players can perform moves which rely on foot freedom, such as kickflips. The opportunity to wipe out more spectacularly than ever before will, presumably, be a big hit online. Perhaps **Edge** will spend a little more time on the practice slopes this time.





Amped 2 blurs the lines between skateboarding and snowboarding with 'snow skating'. Your feet are freed from their constraints, *SSX Tricky*-style

Project Gotham Racing 2

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios**
Developer: **Bizarre Creations**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **November**

Previously in **E**125

Over 75,000 photographs were taken from ten cities, but has the decision to move to 30 frames per second damaged the experience?

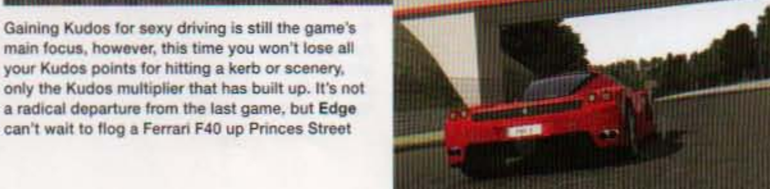




PGR2's environments are much more detailed than those of its predecessor and its animated scenery makes the cities feel far more alive



Gaining Kudos for sexy driving is still the game's main focus, however, this time you won't lose all your Kudos points for hitting a kerb or scenery, only the Kudos multiplier that has built up. It's not a radical departure from the last game, but **Edge** can't wait to flog a Ferrari F40 up Princes Street



The sequel has taken longer than anticipated, but then you have to remember the original only had facsimiles of four cities. Here you get Hong Kong, Stockholm, Florence, Chicago, Washington, Barcelona, Moscow, Sydney, Yokohama and Edinburgh. And just as in *The Getaway*, a lot of the appeal lays in identifying all the coffee shops and patisseries you've ever set foot in. It's beautiful and fascinating, but is it compelling?

There's been a lot of internet derision about Bizarre Creations' decision to lock the framerate at 30 frames per second, but lengthy playtesting has shown this to be of little consequence. *PGR2* does not offer the kind of seat-of-the-pants excitement displayed in the likes of *OutRun2* (p45), but it delivers a more considered, 'realistic' drive. The vehicles hug the ground with a believable sense of weight, which makes cornering a precision sport. Overtaking is, therefore, much more satisfying and losing Kudos due to erratic driving is now no one's fault but your own.

With a more friendly, more open-ended structure and the promise of further downloadable tracks via Xbox Live (the first is set to include the Nürburgring), *Project Gotham Racing 2* is an interesting, if not completely astonishing, prospect.

Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: In-house
Origin: US
Release: October 31 (UK)

Previously in E12

Winged in development, spiralling towards the ground, but Crimson Skies has righted itself and is finally heading for release...





Edge has sampled the spin-off books that accompanied the PC game; hopefully the plot for this Xbox iteration can reach greater heights

Crimson Skies was originally due out last year, around the same time as *Mech Assault*. When **Edge** saw it last it was almost complete, and appeared to be a solid story-based dogfighting experience, unspectacular but sure to sell in mediocre amounts to those who found Nathan Zachary's PC adventures compelling. But that wasn't good enough for Microsoft, evidently; the lead designer was taken off the project, and *Crimson Skies* underwent a complete makeover intended to differentiate it from a routine aerial combat game. Still, the principles remain intact. The player pilots nippy planes around the skies of an alternate earth, where aerial piracy's fine as long as you've got good intentions, roguish good looks and a fine line in comebacks.

The big change is that *Crimson Skies* now takes place in a series of massive skyboxes which hold Zachary's zeppelin skybase, the Pandora, and missions that are triggered by entering certain parts of the map. That flexibility, along with the ability to fly back to the Pandora at any point and change an unwieldy vehicle for something more suitable, adds weight and variety to a previously limited experience. *GTAIII* appears to have persuaded game designers that non-linearity is a good thing, and the sense of a wider world behind the story-based adventure serves *Crimson Skies* well.



As well as the singleplayer campaign, *Crimson Skies* offers several multiplayer modes, including one which involves carrying a chicken to a goal. Xbox Live support is likely to prove popular

Battlestar Galactica

Format: PS2, Xbox
Publisher: Vivendi Universal
Developer: Warthog
Origin: UK
Release: November 2

Previously in E12

Warthog goes back in time for this epic space shooter. Will a spunky young Adama prove more of a draw than a sulky young Anakin?

Mocked but enduring, the 'Battlestar Galactica' universe is a rich seam: strong characters, memorable mech, inspiring pioneer spirit and excellently sinister baddies. Set at the start of Adama's career, the game charts the events that result in his eventual promotion to commander of the rag-tag human fleet.

Your tasks range from pursuits and dogfights to escort and protect missions, and as the game progresses your own rank and the skills of your wingmen improves. Missiles can be balanced for speed, agility, power and blast radius, and you pilot both human and Cylon ships.

Inspired by the series, there's a heavy emphasis on the visuals, but the grand scale of the settings dilutes any sense of speed – indeed, in some cases any sense of motion whatsoever – and the extreme manoeuvrability of the Viper actually detracts from the impression that you are flying a real ship. Missions are poorly explained, and repetitive voice samples serve only to infuriate rather than inform.

As ever, preview code can't be taken as representative of the finished state of the game. However, with little more than a month till release, the anxiety is that these core aspects will not be brought in line with the quality of the impressive cinematics and rousing score.



Warthog has chartered this territory before with the rather lacklustre *Star Trek: Invasion*. Like that game *Battlestar Galactica* looks as if it could get repetitive very quickly. Now we await the 'Space: 1999' licence with eager anticipation





The preview code was poor, but it still had Edge humming the theme tune. And no, don't dare go 'biddybiddybiddy' – that was 'Buck Rogers'

Prescreen Alphas

This month's announcements and updates...

Berserk

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sammy
Developer: In-house





Based on a massively popular manga series, *Berserk* is an ultra-violent scrolling beat 'em up featuring similarly numerous enemies as the likes of *Dynasty Warriors* and *Drag-On Dragoon* (p98)

Crimson Tears

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house/Spike/Dream Factory





In 2049, a new kind of weapon is designed: the human biological weapon. Which actually turns out to be three female fighters who have to fight their way across this 3D beat 'em up

Donkey Konga

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Namco





Aware that there are no rhythm action games on the GC, Nintendo has entrusted Namco with this. A specific bongo controller (which includes a microphone) has been designed for the title

Hyper Street Fighter II

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house





Although some demanded a substantial update to celebrate its 15th anniversary, this is a fairly simple revision of the original *Street Fighter II*. You won't find **Edge** complaining though

Jiraya

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house





Based on a TV animation licence, *Jiraya* features character design by Susumu Matsushita – better known for his work on the cover of 'Famitsu' magazine. Twoplayer cooperative mode included

Kingdom Hearts 2

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: In-house





With the action taking place a year after the defeat of Evil at the end of the first game, *Kingdom Hearts 2* introduces one or two new characters – perhaps even Mickey himself

Need for Speed Underground

Format: PC, PS2, Xbox, GC
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: In-house (EA Canada)





At this stage there may be a few concerns regarding the handling dynamic but it's only something that will become apparent with more playtesting. Expect a review next issue

True Fantasy Live Online

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Factor 5





Although expected to announce the dates of the beta test, Microsoft revealed very little in the way of new information about its forthcoming MMRPG at the recent Tokyo Game Show





Inside...

Electronic Arts

Last year, 22 of EA's games sold more than a million, Edge visits its Californian studios and finds the company's success to be a tale of two cities...

San Francisco maps are a riddle of coloured lines. Five generations of transport systems trace over each other's networks, the iron cogs and brass trims of the trams rattling over the tunnels of the sleek and spotless BART. Preposterous bridges span the flat blue of the bay, power lines marching in step beside them. The airport is built on a tessellation of reclaimed land, squares slotted together so neatly you almost can't see the joins. **Edge** is here to visit the home of *The Sims*.

The offices are cramped, the virus-like re-doubling of **Will Wright**'s Sim universe having spread to every corner of the building. Threading between endless grey cubicles, **Edge** is given glimpses of new strains – *Sim City*'s *Road Rage* expansion pack, the console sequel *The Sims: Bustin' Out*, its GBA little sister and the latest *Sims* expansion *Makin' Magic*.

By far the biggest project is *The Sims 2*. A graphical leap from its predecessor, the most dramatic change is an increase in detail and a removal of abstraction. Sims no longer communicate by icon, instead their expressions and gestures do the talking. Characterisations become much more pronounced, expressed through differing animations for the same actions. An outgoing girl will flirt with a swagger and a wolf-whistle, whereas her shy sister may handle the same situation with a softly whispered proposition. The increase of visual detail is reflected in the complexity of the environments. If one Sim turns a tap on in the kitchen, his unfortunate brother in the shower will get a sudden dousing of freezing cold water.

To give more direction to the gameplay, *The Sims 2* introduces a memory system. Particularly vivid experiences, whether good – such as your Sim's first kiss – or bad, are recorded as a memory. The player can revisit these throughout the game, although the Sim will need to keep the memory fresh by reminiscing about the event with other characters who witnessed it.

The Lord of the Rings, The Battle for Middle Earth

Platform: PC
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: In-house
Out: Spring 2004
Origin: US

Be the lord of 'The Lord of the Rings' in what EA promises will be the best fantasy RTS of all time

For the team behind *C&C Generals*, the attraction of producing a 'Lord of the Rings' RTS was the chance to put right the battles that go badly in the films. It's an appealing but slightly odd thought, since much of the resonance of the story is based on the defeats and bleak fatalism of the Fellowship's task.

EA's licence does not include the books, so it is limited strictly to what is depicted or referred to across all three films, putting huge swathes of Tolkien lore out of their grasp. But the deal has its blessings. The lion's share of the visualisation process has already been accomplished, and it's gratifying to watch Ents tear lumps of masonry out of a battle tower and splash them into a muddle of orcs.

Eager to move away from the mundane absurdity of typical resource management, you will not be required to send teams out to hack away at a gold deposit while Sauron's shadow lengthens on the land. Instead, each side has individually tailored concerns, so, for example, Rohan must tend to the refugees flooding into its gates.

One of the team's main concerns is the interface, which must be fine-tuned to satisfy strategy veterans, but not intimidate the film's fans who are RTS newbies. **Edge** just hopes that Tolkien fervour hasn't abated by the time it gets finished.



Although the troll models were lifted directly from the films, they initially looked disproportioned. Designed from a hobbit's eye view they did not translate to the 'god's eye' perspective of a traditional realtime strategy game and so had to be reshaped





2004 is shaping up to be a big year for war elephants, and these are particularly impressive examples. Used as archery platforms they have the height to take on battlements and the strength to break down gates

The big draw, however, is the new biology of your miniature charges. The Sims now age in seven distinct stages and their maturity is reflected in their actions. Only the adults are allowed to indulge in a spot of what the Sims universe very coyly calls 'play'. Each Sim also has distinct DNA that is passed down to their children and will affect their looks and personalities. Already addictive enough for some people's liking, the potential for the creation of epic dynasties may tie players to the game for years.

From the suburban simulations of San Francisco's public services, **Edge** heads for LA, the city of dreams. At least, **Edge** hopes that's what it's full of, since there's precious little else on display. The *Medal of Honor* series has always aspired to what the designers call "the cinematic experience", and the new PC title – *Pacific Assault* – is drawing on both the techniques and the personnel of Hollywood.

The Pacific theatre's atolls and jungles are a world away from the flat mud of Europe's battlefields, and EA's recreation of it is startlingly beautiful. The impact is not just aesthetic. The liveliness of the environments controlled by carefully calculated physics – each bullet fired startling birds out of trees, each bird triggering perfectly calibrated ripples as it skims across the surface of the lake.

The heavy emphasis on plot and character means that the modelling has to be

> "There's a sign that should read 'EA: Challenge Everything'. But the 'challenge' is obscured, so the sign reads simply 'EA: Everything'"

Medal of Honor Rising Sun

Platform: PS2, Xbox
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: In-house
Out: November 28
Origin: US

EA's Spielbergian World War II franchise skips across to a different front, and remains resolutely blood free

Without wanting to turn what's meant to be a preview into some kind of critique, it's pretty clear there won't be much wrong with *Medal of Honor*. Which isn't to say it's going to score particularly highly, because while **Edge**'s brief playtest reveals it to be competent in everything it does, it also fails to leave any lasting impression whatsoever. Indeed, without the help of a factsheet, it's difficult to recall anything past the opening sequence which sees our protagonist awoken at Pearl Harbor by the sound of falling bombs.

So: ten levels, offering a (somewhat) less linear canyon feel than its predecessor, and ten fourplayer deathmatch maps. Twenty 'authentic' World War II weapons the majority of which **Edge** would guess have already been featured in the glut of WWII straight shooters videogaming has already experienced. A storyline involving you searching for your brother, and various set-pieces inspired by the classic war films that *Rising Sun* clearly wants to emulate. It's all blessed with the EA professionalism you'd expect, with more-than-adequate graphics, excellent audio, and a seal of approval from WWII vet Dale Dye. But those wishing to be inspired will probably need to look elsewhere.

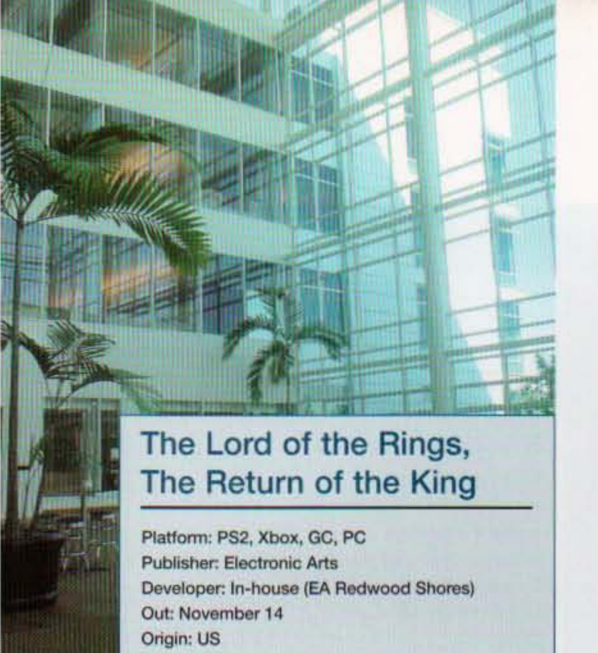


The Japanese soldiers exhibit slightly different AI to their German counterparts, often choosing to charge in rather than stand off and shoot. The jungle levels sees them appearing from hidden underground caves and bunkers, while long grass both disorientates the player and obscures enemies

FAQ

Company name: Electronic Arts
Founded: 1982
HQ: Redwood City, California
Number of employees: 4,400
Selected softography: *Madden* series, *FIFA* series, *Tiger Woods PGA Tour* series, *Need for Speed* series, *SSX* series, *The Sims* series, *Sim City* series, *Command & Conquer* series, *James Bond 007* series, *Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup*, *Def Jam Vendetta*, *Battlefield 1942*
Selected projects in development: *Medal of Honor Pacific Assault*, *Medal of Honor Rising Sun*, *The Sims 2*, *The Sims Bustin' Out*, *The Lord of the Rings, The Return of the King*, *The Lord of the Rings, The Battle for Middle Earth*





The Lord of the Rings, The Return of the King

Platform: PS2, Xbox, GC, PC
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: In-house (EA Redwood Shores)
Out: November 14
Origin: US

EA returns to Middle Earth, and Edge gleefully returns to its cinematic soapbox...

Edge's feelings towards the first two parts of Jackson's trilogy are well known, but it's worth restating them briefly, if only to ensure next month's letters bag will be full of hobbitophilic bile. So: the 'Lord of the Rings' films are boring and rubbish. This is important, because, extraordinarily, EA's first game was anything but, being a tremendously dumb, impeccably presented, *Golden Axe*-style romp through two-thirds of the tedious trilogy. This begins where the last left off, the overlapping tutorial level taking you to the battle at Helms Deep, where you can now play as Gandalf.

Predictably for a sequel the game offers bigger levels and more characters, but EA's major addition is cooperative play. While the company's ongoing spat with Microsoft over its Live pricing policy means no network options in the Xbox version, US PS2 owners will benefit from online cooperative play. The connectivity doesn't extend to the UK, however, the company claiming that the lack of mainstream support for the PS2's broadband adapter means it simply wasn't worth its while porting the code across to the PAL version. It's a shame, but **Edge** would imagine there's much more appeal in hacking and slashing with a friend at close quarters. It'll beat watching the film, anyway.



Another addition to the game is the introduction of 'action areas'. Blue circles on the ground illustrate cinematic moves which can be executed by the player. These can be passive – climbing down a ladder, for example – or one-shot attacks, such as throwing spears or firing cannons

Interview: **Will Wright**



Creator and chief game designer, *The Sims* and *Sim City*

***The Sims 2* is a big leap forward. Is it always how the game looked in your head?**

When you see *The Sims 2*, the first thing you notice is the graphics. The more subtle thing is that the camera is in closer, which means they have facial expressions, more body language.

How did you know it was time to go for a sequel rather than just another expansion pack?

Well, a while ago I looked back and realised that each version of *Sim City* had been exactly, within a month, four years after the previous version. It was just like clockwork. And then, at some point we looked over at *The Sims*, and thought, "When shall we do a sequel?" And it turned out to be four years, almost to the month. So I think we've pretty much resigned ourselves to it now.

It's been a phenomenally successfully game. Do you understand why some people are uncomfortable with it?

I'm really happy about that. Some people are very creeped out by it – in fact, there's an undercurrent of creepiness to *The Sims*. For a lot of people it feels like either this spooky "why am I doing this, I could be doing it in real life" aspect. And then there's kind of this voodoo doll aspect to it. Also, I think there are some hardcore gamers who don't quite see there's a real game in *The Sims*.

So what was it that made it so appealing to non-hardcore gamers. The humour?

The humour is familiar from a lot of television series – you can sit there for five minutes and get a laugh, or you can play it for longer, but the game never expected you to sit there for two hours and play a scenario. If people can play a game for five or ten minutes at a time – the way people play 'Solitaire' – then it becomes what I would call interstitial gaming. If the game can be flexible enough to fit into those little cracks of time that you've got, that's a huge attraction to most people.

Do you think the industry is turning more towards sandbox gaming?

I think a branch of it will. It's more a recognition of the value of just pure play, as opposed to competition or achievement. This kind of goes hand in hand with creativity as well – a lot of people like to feel that they've solved a puzzle in a way that no one else has. Most gaming has been under the model of movies. There's the intro, there's the game, there's the climax at the end, and then it's over, you've beaten the game. The games that we do are much more like hobbies, like a train set or a doll's house. That's what gives the game legs. You're not going to start a hobby, do it for three weeks and then put it away and start another hobby. Instead the game becomes a kind of palette for you to express yourself.

up to the job. The faces of the main characters change over the several years the story takes to tell. Bruises swell and fade, cuts fade to faint scars. The thinning faces and narrowing eyes are reflected in a shift in attitudes and vocabulary, as soft new recruits harden into battle veterans. If the impressive visuals are successfully inserted into the game, then players are going to form very close emotional ties with their squad mates. Will all of them make it home alive, **Edge** wonders? The team isn't saying, but they are winking and shaking their heads a little.

As yet very little of the planned gameplay has been integrated into this luscious environment. Although you still play as a single soldier, *Pacific Assault* should introduce more of a squad dynamic. A hand gesture system lets you know what your unit is supposed to be doing, and although you are free to ignore the commands, other soldiers will notice and comment on your disobedience. Instead of intrusively improbable medi-packs, should you be wounded you'll have to call for a medic. You'll need to provide cover for him until he makes it to your position, however, since he won't be able to treat you if he's crumpled in a bloodied heap.

Electronic Arts' ambitions are growing. In the foyer, there's a sign that should read 'EA: Challenge Everything'. But the 'challenge' is obscured, so the sign reads simply 'EA: Everything'. The '™' tagged on the end just hammers the point home. **Mark Scaggs**, executive producer on *The Battle for Middle Earth* concedes that the company's heritage is not the proudest, but is confident that things are changing. "The policy now," he says, "is if it's not a great game, we're not going to release it."

With its extraordinary dominance of the western market, EA is in an oddly responsible position. The shape of the videogame industry as a whole will be affected by whether or not it makes a success of this shift from quantity to quality.

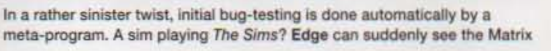












In a rather sinister twist, initial bug-testing is done automatically by a meta-program. A sim playing *The Sims*? Edge can suddenly see the Matrix





The *MoH* team faced some odd moral choices. Despite making entertainment out of war and death, it decided not to include monkeys in case players took pot shots at them and outraged animal lovers

Interview: **Rick Giolito**



Executive producer, *Medal of Honor* series

Is it limiting making a game based on real events – are you jealous of the freedom the *Half-Life 2* team have?

There's two sides to that story. Since our game is based on historical events people already understand what the fiction is and we don't have to spend time explaining who's good and who's bad, and that's a big advantage.

The disadvantage is that they can do anything – monsters, different weapons sets. Our challenge is to make it real for people. They can marvel at the sacrifice shown, and say, "Wow, this stuff really happened. How did anyone ever get brave enough to step off a landing craft at Omaha beach?" It's much more visceral and real. When you go into sci-fi, people have a tendency to look at the BFG or whatever and go, "Wow, that's cool, but this isn't real for me."

What's the thinking behind the changes you made for the console-based *Medal of Honor* games?

I have a very, very strong opinion about that. The console products are made to be shown on a television set that you sit just five or six feet from. You have to transcend the space between the television and the player, and so you have to build a game that's a little broader, a little more accessible, much clearer and more matter of fact. The PC product is much more intimate, you're closer to the screen, you're usually alone – even if you're playing with someone in the online space you're still alone.

The more realism you promise, the more things can jar when they don't work as you'd expect. Does that concern you?

It poses some challenges. I think that players will love the opportunity to have fully interactive games – where they can go over there and pick something up and throw it against the wall. When you make everything in the world accessible to the player they start making their own gameplay – trying to get through the whole level just by using rocks, or whatever. As a matter of fact, any game anybody makes is about trying to allow the players the freedom to do almost anything.

Is there ever a point when realism has to be sacrificed to gameplay?

Well, I don't make games that are realistic; I make games that are authentic. If I made a realistic WWII FPS, if you got shot you would fall to the ground, and we don't do that.

Do you think there's a danger in the game industry looking too much towards films?

I think there's always a danger in taking a stand and making a big commitment, that's just the way I am, and I drive this particular team. I also thinks there's a big danger in not doing that, in hanging on to the tenets of the past and saying, "Games are games and film are films".

But surely that's not a tenet of the past – it's a simple statement of fact.

Well, you're saying that they're very different things, and I say that I believe that they are very, very close, and that they are moving closer and I'm trying to push them closer.

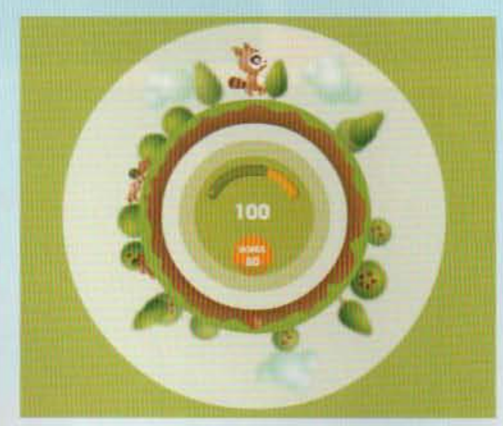
So does that make Hollywood the best place in the world to make games?

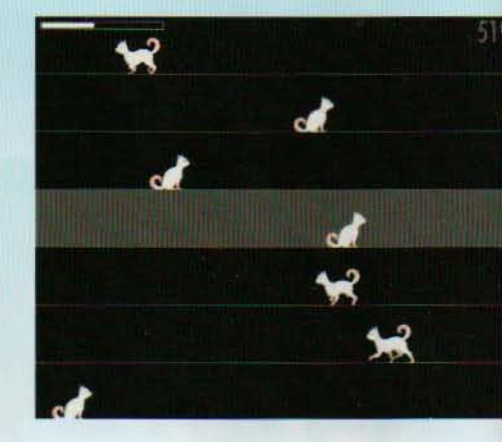
[Gestures to the palm trees and smiles.] I'd say so.

Repeat to fade

Will a return to abstraction halt videogaming's creative malignancy?









For more info visit www.orisinal.com







For more info visit www.freshsensation.com/samorost.swf









Videogame adventurers used to be driven, not by the pursuit of closure, but by the thrill of exploration. Each new level provided a reward for getting so far, while the promise of more pushed players on further. Perhaps the last great exploration game was *Tomb Raider*, a game which many take as a watermark in videogaming. *Tomb Raider*, it's said, illustrates the moment when developers fell in love with realism, gaming entered the 3D age, and game visuals moved from the abstract to pragmatic representations.

Samarost is an experimental flash game by Amanita Design, the company front for Czech animator Jakub Dvorsky. Its point-and-click structure recalls *Myst*, requiring players to interact with a series of surrealist landscapes in order to progress through them. It is not the greatest 'game' by any means, but players are driven to solve the puzzle on each screen by the prospect of seeing the next. The atmosphere is just too bewitching to even imagine giving up. How many console titles can you really say that about?

So is it indicative of a creatively retarded industry that it takes a Shockwave Flash game to take **Edge**'s breath away? Or is Flash bringing a different kind of creative person – like Orisinal.com's Ferry Halim – into an interactive environment they've never explored before? Perhaps the games industry will follow suit. Perhaps, as realism becomes genuinely attainable, developers will seek abstraction to differentiate their products from others; perhaps *Jet Set Radio* and *Viewtiful Joe* are just the breaking waves, and there's a tsunami of visual innovation to come.

Or perhaps we'll be stuck with forest levels, snow levels, lava levels and those goddamned mine carts forever. Think for a second. This apathy that pervades as we get older, this lack of drive we attribute to old age: could it be because we've seen it all before?











Welcome to the game bar

Edge reflects on where the business is really done at the European Computer Trade Show

Edge will let you into a terrible secret: inside **Edge** there is a writer clawing to get out, and it comes to the fore when it starts to drink. Inebriation brings a certain rhythm; the brain gets lucid, and passes words without thought, freestyle. Too much alcohol, of course, and it becomes incoherent; more than that and it stops. It's about striking that balance, freeing the language. Dangerous game. But isn't that the idea, that each person has a novel inside them? Of course, that's where they should stay, unwritten and unedited, far away from bookshelves. Being a multi-faceted entity **Edge** could suppose that it had at least eight novels inside of it – but this particular face of the faceless 'zine knows that most internal novels should stay internal. The world has enough airport fiction.

Besides, **Edge** has plenty of non-fiction worth recording, and some day, when all of this is over, the magazine's uncensored memoirs will make a lot of people blush and a lot of people giggle. See, it doesn't matter if you're a great writer or not. When you've got a story worth telling, people want to hear it. "We'll blow the game publishing sector wide open with this!" giggles a future-perfect **Edge**. "Blockbuster, bonkbuster, ex-pos-é!" And then it has another drink. God, **Edge** is rambling, isn't it? Sorry, sorry…

Because those stories are meant for another day. This story is about the videogame industry and alcohol-sponsored interaction, an essay on ECTS written at the show's centrepiece, the 'MCV'-sponsored bar. 'MCV' is a trade paper sent out to companies across the videogame industry – to publishers, to developers, to PRs, to retailers, to journalists and beyond. If it is the family newsletter, then trade shows are the gatherings, weddings and sometimes funerals. The last celebration was in May, at E3. Oh, what a celebration. Everyone was there.

And, as E3's size and importance to the industry grows exponentially, so ECTS finds itself having to assume a slightly different role. The majority of the key people visiting the show will have seen the majority of the key titles in some form or another long before today. That means that this year, more than ever, the three-day exhibition is more about meeting people and making deals; about that social element. And where are people most sociable? At the bar.

That's where **Edge** is, perched on a stool, drinking expensive bottles of imported alcohol and scanning the crowd. Alone, utterly, absolutely alone. Not because it's unpopular, you understand, but because that's what it's here for. Observation. Besides, the bar isn't packed,



Photography: Martin Thompson

perhaps because it's still quite early, the time on **Edge**'s watch belying the amount **Edge** has had to drink. Perhaps also because the show is less busy than usual, the flash and bang and comparative glamour of next door's PlayStation Experience drawing attendees' attention away from the trade show and towards sobriety. So, while the place is empty, **Edge** enters a routine. Glance, look around, take a sip. Glance, look around, take a sip. Glance, look around, and – whoah, it's all gone, so turn to the bar and order another. When **Edge** starts to drink it's this sort of writing that comes to the fore. That's why **Edge** writes **Edge** sober. Well, the bulk of it, anyway.

Three types of ECTS-goer

The people here – and who will be here over the next three days – split broadly into three caricatures. There are the developers seeking refuge from GDCE. They wear black t-shirts and have peculiar hair and piercings and are, alternately, overweight and underweight. Then there are the shiny-suited publishers, prowling for their counterparts in positions across Europe, smiling with insincerity and swapping business cards with people they're training to secretly loathe. The third are the recruitment consultants, but we'll come to those in a moment.

You'll notice one group is missing. The press – often the most hideous component of ECTS, being a mish-mash of yawnsome jaded specialists who've seen it all before and hyperactive webkids playing at being something that matters – don't spend much time by the bar. They're all in the press lounge, hogging the PCs, delighting in their special status as they devour free electricity with the fervour of a ravenous man at a buffet. There is no buffet here. The free food at GDCE does not extend as far as the press room. That's okay. Most of its inhabitants could do with losing some weight anyway. **Edge** continues its liquid lunch.

The members of the press who do stop by are either here to meet someone or friends of **Edge**'s wondering why the magazine's capitulating to alcohol at such an early hour. One new convert to videogame journalism shows up early afternoon, tired expression illustrating just how quickly the ECTS malaise affects bright young things. She smiles wearily. She has to go to another product demo, which she may enjoy, but right now her day feels like one long chain of USP soundbites. As she walks away, another woman tracks her, gauging her, weighing her value. That woman is a recruitment consultant.

For the record, there are not many women at ECTS. More than there were a few years ago, sure, but still not many. The balance is evened slightly by the booth babes, whose parched, leathery, UV-baked skin provides both a resting place for luridly sponsored thin strips of cotton, and for the attentions of the sexually retarded. But they are static, even when they move. When Running With Scissors' pack of dead-eyed dolls promoting *Postal 2* come trawling through the bar, all eyes follow them, and their cellulite. But **Edge** feels a chill, an absolute vacuum of movement of interest, of energy.

When they leave, **Edge** goes back to watching the other female force, those recruitment consultants. They prowl the bar area like hungry velociraptors, hunting in pairs, talking but checking over each other's shoulders for potential clients. Every badge is glanced at. One company takes to leaving chocolates at the bar, lovely chocolates for sure, but there's a nagging doubt that each one is laced with Rohypnol, and the idea is that you'll wake up to find yourself with a new job and minus a finding fee. Didn't **Edge**'s mother warn it not to take candy from strangers? No matter. They're delicious.

For a while, a little later, when the bar gets more packed, **Edge** talks games with people from Midway and Acclaim and SCi. If you take a moment to listen in on the conversations all around you'll hear them sprinkled with references to various vested interests. Not with **Edge**. *Halo*, *Rez*, and *Ico* are the pillars of sentient game conversation, and it never tires of talking about them, especially when it's been drinking, even if this is a corporate bar, made for doing deals and self-promotion. And this *is* a corporate bar. How do we know? Because the bar staff automatically give you a receipt when handing over a drink. **Edge** tests the theory by ordering another.

Waving, not drowning

"Don't get me wrong – I love women," says a heavily gelled ageing wideboy, loudly. For the record, there are not many women at ECTS. He is one of the reasons why. But here is one: a PR for THQ hustles by, eyes darting. She does not stop. Someone waves; **Edge** waves back. Who? Not sure. Someone from… No, no idea. **Edge** spots someone it does know across the bar. Should it risk losing its seat to those looking for an area to demo products? No. Wait for the entertainment to come to it. Why does **Edge** feel like **Edge** has been crying? Oh, god.

At least **Edge** has a seat. There is some competition for seats and tables. There has been all day, even when the bar was empty. Many attendees are representatives of companies who, for whatever reason, decide that it's not worth their while booking a stand at the event. But they still have products to show off, and who'd want to miss an opportunity like this, when all the scu– DELETE DELETE DELETE press are here under one roof? Empire Interactive gets around it by booking a pub around a corner. Others don't even bother to go that far.

There's an example, pertinently enough. A developer – **Edge** presumes he's a developer, and while we're speculating wildly let's say… from a start-up in Eastern Europe, with a plucky young idea soon to be crushed under the weight of market forces – spots a table being vacated. The departees are maybe half a foot away when he slams his laptop on the table, lunging forward and pulling himself up onto a spare stool. He flips the laptop open with the faked nonchalance of a man briefly out of breath, and then, the finishing touch: he plonks a tiny flag, emblazoned with his company's name, on the table, and looks around for customers.

He will be looking all afternoon. And, as the afternoon turns into evening, the atmosphere gets louder, almost verging on raucous. "A one-level demo… by Christmas!" exclaims one outraged developer, spitting beer with disgust. Behind **Edge**, another discusses golf tips with his agent. **Edge**'s scribbled loops get wider. Here's a secret for you: when **Edge** is drunk the writer comes to the fore, but when it's more drunk those words just turn into illegible expletives – and it can barely read what happens next. It has something to do with a publisher, probably, something in suits, suits everywhere, drinks everywhere. Business cards are slipped from shiny silver holders and exchanged, dropped in plastic files stolen from the stationery cupboard, placed in the bulging pockets of birthday present briefcases, pushed into the back pockets of fat, fat asses. That's potentially offensive in Japan, **Edge** notes. Not here, apparently. It has another drink and there, abruptly, stops writing.

"He flips the laptop open with the faked nonchalance of a man out of breath, and then, the finishing touch, plonks a flag bearing his company's name on the table"





Wonderful weird

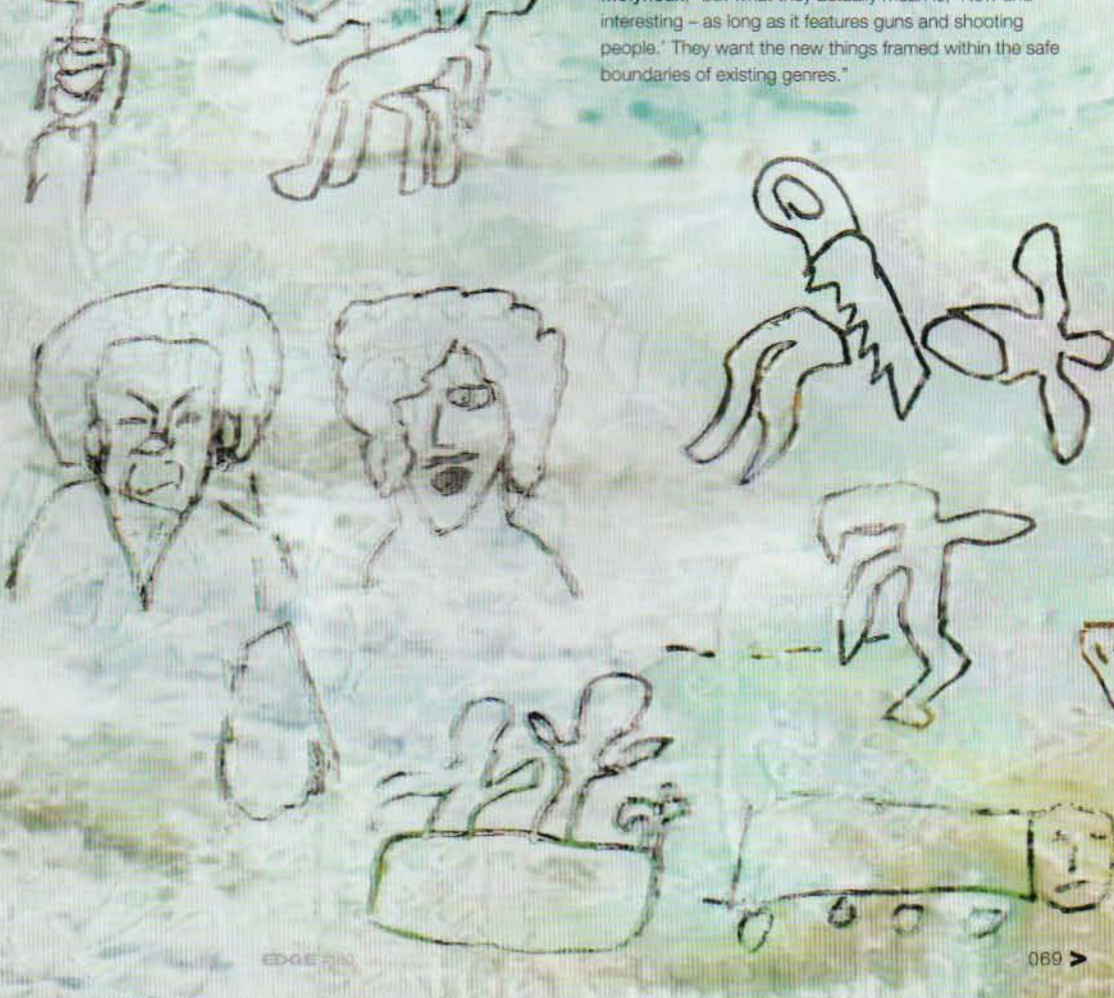
With sequel-itis and licence-pox nibbling away at the industry's creative soul, **Edge** celebrates the maverick breed of the past and wonders – is weirdness a dying art?

When the designers of '80s Williams coin-op *Joust* proposed their gameplan of knights riding ostriches and lava trolls and pterodactyls and rival knights riding vultures who lay eggs which turn into other rival knights... they weren't laughed out of the boardroom. Back before gaming was at ease with itself as a business, there were so few reference points, it was okay to make it up as you went along. As the old Hollywood mantra goes, "Nobody knows anything."

Now, though, mainstream programmers rarely get a chance to flex their creative muscles, because games are no longer designed in splendid isolation. They're hammered out in air-conditioned coding hives, shepherded from pitch to retail by armies of producers and PRs, all – understandably – keen to keep their jobs by making money for the people they work for. And, according to conventional wisdom, you don't make money by producing a game so odd and unwieldy that it refuses to settle into any of the trusted genre compartments, isn't a sequel to an already established game or doesn't even have the decency to be allied to a film/TV show/celebrity.

"It's risky to present today's gamers with games that require a lot of time investment," says *Pimania/ID* author **Mel Croucher**. "Instant gratification is the key – be it from the game itself or from whatever endorsement surrounds it. And endorsed games tend to be samey because the licences cost silly money and are beyond the reach of the smaller, more interesting developers."

Publishers may secretly crave another *Tetris* – something original that comes from nowhere and twangs a collective one-more-go nerve – but now the market is so sophisticated, the shock of the new is too jarring. There has to be an air of familiarity to give a game the initial lift. "On the one hand, you have publishers saying that they want new and interesting concepts – things that have never been seen before," says Lionhead's **Peter Molyneux**, "but what they actually mean is, 'New and interesting – as long as it features guns and shooting people.' They want the new things framed within the safe boundaries of existing genres."



Happily, high-street chain GAME has the range and room to be flexible (it stocks around 2,500 lines in each store). "If there's a clear customer demand for a game, then we'll stock it," says PR assistant **Lisa Artemis**. "Feedback from store/regional managers trickles up to the buying managers. The buyers know their stuff – they read reviews, keep up with industry buzz. We don't just pour everything into the latest *Tomb Raider* or whatever. Look at something like *Ico*. We stocked it because it was a fantastic game, not off some kind of pre-sold blockbuster status."

Still, publishers don't really want the likes of *Ico* in the first place. Molyneux again: "The cold, hard truth is that if I came to you and said you had to bear all the money you'll ever earn in your life on one game concept and you had to choose between *Wonderful Starry Things Floating In Space*, *Bloke Running Around Corridors Shooting Aliens* and *Bloke Driving A Tank Around London Shooting Things*, you're not going to go for *Wonderful Starry Things*. With something like *Unity*, we're aware that we're entering undiscovered territory, and it's a very difficult concept to describe. But we know that the quality will shine through once we get out and show it to people."

For Molyneux, the vibrancy of internet-based game design is reflective of the mainstream industry's creative crisis. "There are plenty of concepts that never make it into full games – minigames on websites, minigames within larger games. There is plenty of invention out there, but for an original game concept to come through, it has to have money spent on it."

Croucher goes even further. "What the games industry needs is for creative brains to bypass the megalithic labels and go direct to the consumer via the internet. Just like the music industry labels are about to be killed, as more and more artists wake up to the fact that they don't need record labels any more. The sooner the better."

So, all hail the odd, the out-there and the abstract. Less of the reality-recreating tech-demos and more invention, more discovery, more soul...

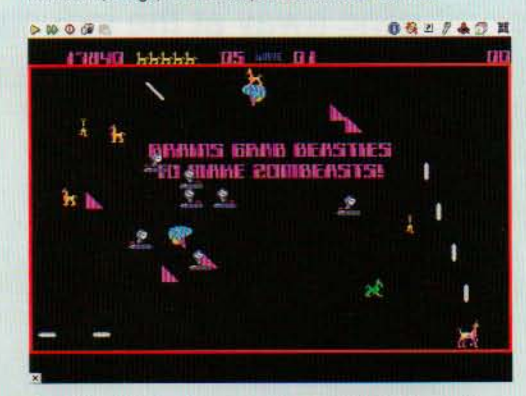


Spaced Oddities

Not all classics, granted. But here are 20 of **Edge**'s favourite strangest moments in videogaming...

Llamatron

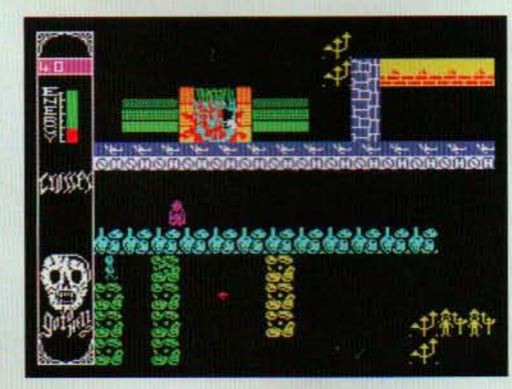
Format: **ST, Amiga, PC** ■ Developer: **Llamasoft** ■ Year: **1991**



One of the pioneering shareware games (many insisted on paying more than the standard fiver). Serial iconoclast Jeff Minter stripped out Eugene Jarvis' original *Robotron* design and hotwired it into his own manic vision – a laser-gobbing llama who rescues the usual ungulates and ruminants from shuffling gangs of fag packets, joysticks, burgers, Mandelbrot fractals, turds, telephones and happy, smiling faces. Sourpusses may harumph at the remake mentality, but **Edge** says: funny, frantic, as English as a Knickerbocker Glory and still criminally playable after all these years.

Go To Hell

Format: **Spectrum** ■ Developer: **Triple-Six Software** ■ Year: **1985**



One of the joys of the bedroom-coder era was that anyone, however twisted, could write a game and, with a little persistence, get it published. *Go To Hell* author John George Jones claimed that he wrote it as a response to the software houses who told him to do just that. It's a basic maze game with ever-squelching sound effects and a design ethic that seems to celebrate the Spectrum's legendary attribute-clash as a positive thing. The idea is to guide your stick-man out of Hell, by lobbing crucifixes at flickering demons, while dodging the sicko set-piece animated scenery (naughty souls being sawn in half, stretched on racks, having knives repeatedly smashed into their heads via a cute little crusher thing...). Still, Jones wasn't without a sense of humour – a few years later, he produced a sequel, *Soft & Cuddly*, in which the player was asked whether they wanted their character to have a silly walk or not.

Boong-Ga Boong-Ga

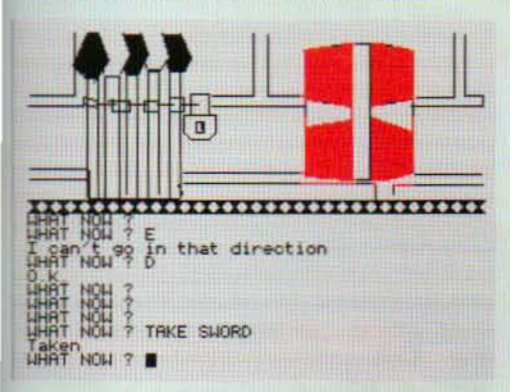
Format: **Arcade** ■ Developer: **NTS Soft** ■ Year: **2000**



"This is a fun game of spanking the people that make your life miserable... after detecting your power with a sensor, a card will come out. It will explain your sexual behaviour." In a little corner of Japan, wild videogames still roam free, unthreatened by tiresome restrictions of genre, demographics or good taste. Some charm thei way to the west via import, while others – like this – seem destined t never even attempt the cultural leap. The bemani trend (*DDR*, *Beatmania*, etc) has introduced a pleasingly embarrassing physical element to global arcade gaming, but it's hard to imagine a bleary-eyed lorry driver enthusiastically poking a plastic finger up a plastic arse at the Little Chef on the M4.

The Feasibility Experiment

Format: **Spectrum, C64** ■ Developer: **Channel 8** ■ Year: **1983**



Text adventures/interactive fiction have an inbuilt licence for abstract weirdness. *The Feasibility Experiment* author Brian Howarth had carved out a tidy niche with 8bit ports of Scott Adams' notoriously obtuse adventures, but his own games were sharper and more ambitious. From *TFE*'s first location description ("I feel a surge of strange power… things I can see: vague shapes."), we clearly weren't in Kansas any more. The rest of the game was a glorious stream-of-consciousness ramble involving Roman gladiators, stone-age villages and aliens. Aliens that took the form of vague shapes – if that's possible. Strange and affecting.

Pepsiman

Format: **PSone** ■ Developer: **Kindle Interactive** ■ Year: **1999**



At least the *Cool Spot* 7-Up branding had the decency to be subtle. Here, Pepsi's Japanese corporate cipher stars in a *Crash Bandicoot*-by-the-numbers thing which involves a borderline illegal level of branding and barely any gameplay at all. Pepsiman is a unique superhero, in that he flails and flops about the place like a spandexed Frank Spencer and possesses no superpowers at all, other than the ability to dispense Pepsi from thin air. It's curious, creepy and reminiscent of something that would appear in an episode of 'The Simpsons' as a far-fetched satire on what videogames will be like in the future.

Journey

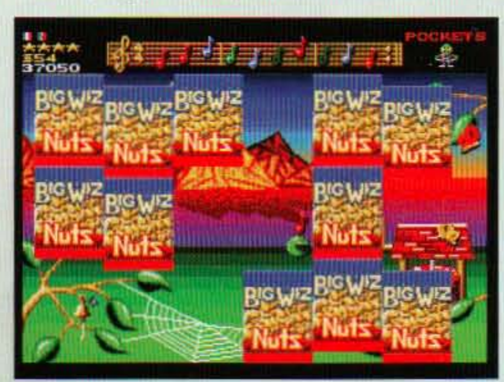
Format: **Arcade** ■ Developer: **Bally Midway** ■ Year: **1983**



Back in 1983, Middle America was in awe of huge-haired, soft-focus, non-threatening rawk. Grasping the commercial nettle, Bally Midway locked a work-experience guy in a room and told him to write a game – otherwise, they wouldn't let him out until lunchtime. He came up with *Journey* – featuring the poorly digitised heads of one of the hugest-haired, softest-focus, least threatening rawk bands retrieving their stolen instruments from hostile alien worlds. The odd thing about *Journey* is that it's so bad, it almost comes full circle, playability-wise. Almost. Although, of course, the plot is fatally flawed – if you were a member of one of the richest rock groups on the planet and some aliens stole your instruments, would you a) fly into space and try to get your instruments back, at the risk of getting killed; or b) buy some new ones?

Wizkid

Format: **ST, Amiga, PC** ■ Developer: **Sensible Software** ■ Year: **1992**



It's not the way it plays (a sort of *Wizball Deluxe* – with adventure bits), it's the gleefully hatstand content which makes the Reality Check bit of your brain rather sore. Best of all is the stage with the flying scarf which makes a plane appear, which in turn flies you to the top of a church to grab a cross from the steeple, which, with the help of a drunken clown in a set of stocks who sends you the wrong way because he's drunk, you use to kill a vampire (after deliberately killing yourself). And, if you've been short of disturbed dreams recently, recall the bit with the woman barking in time to 'How Much Is that Doggy in the Window?' (a well-timed jump into her mouth lands you in a bedroom). Well, of course.



Frankie Goes To Hollywood

Format: **Spectrum** ■ Developer: **Denton Designs** ■ Year: **1985**



Way ahead of its time, and one of those games that slow-burns its way into your affection – even if you're not a fan of the '80s Scouser band. You play an everyday sort of '80s guy with a wedge cut and a plan to break out of dead-eyed suburbia and into the mythical Pleasuredome. To qualify for Pleasuredome status, our foppish hero accumulates personality points by competing in a bunch of faintly Frankie-themed minigames (control Ronald Reagan and spit at Yuri Andropov, shoot down German bombers attacking Merseyside, zap the likes of Prince (the purple one) and Maggie Thatcher in a shooting gallery). Imagine the *Wario Ware* minigames neatly blended into a bigger picture. As rangy and cerebral as games were allowed to be in those days.



Ka (aka Mr Mosquito)

Format: **PlayStation2** ■ Developer: **Zoom** ■ Year: **2001**



Realism? Who needs it? Diffuse interreflections and photorealistic texture-mapping are all readily available during a trip to the park. Experiencing life from an insect's perspective is videogame escapism at its purest. Like any industrious robot mosquito, it's your job to buzz around a human family – just out of flapping range – and gorge yourself on their blood to store up for winter. Horrible AI, poor graphics, long load times... but the sheer fact that someone, somewhere had the guile to see this idea through keeps the charm factor high, even when you're busy scuttling around an NPC's bottom lip.

Super Monkey Ball

Format: **GameCube** ■ Developer: **Amusement Vision** ■ Year: **2001**



Just as the paymasters of the old-skool videogame designers were flexible to less mainstream concepts (*Joust*? *Mr Do*? *Pengo*?), all hail the green-lighter of a *Marble Madness* remake featuring... a monkey trapped in a transparent ball. *SMB* is proof that a game can get away with being abstract and kooky provided that playability is first on the list. Part of the game's fun is the frequent double-take realisations that you're controlling a simian trapped in a transparent ball. Never underestimate the inherent funniness of monkeys.

Cho Aniki – Bakuretsu Rantou Hen

Format: **Super Famicom** ■ Developer: **NCS** ■ Year: **1992**



Together at last – beat 'em ups and flagrant homoerotica. There's the woman accompanied by flying cherubs which, during battle, turn into big, tough bouncers... the bodybuilder guy who attacks with a volcanic blast of flatulence and intimidates by vogueing and sticking out his posterior, briefly... a similarly ripped character who can only be described as half Elvis, half pagoda... two naked men a flying bathtub... best of all – one level features a train consisting interlocking locomotives with smiling male faces. Oh, to have been fly on the wall at that pitch meeting.

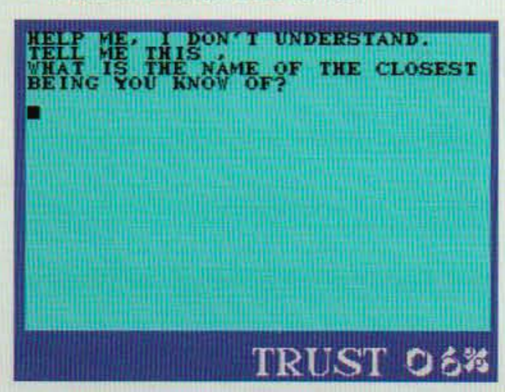
Weird Dreams

Format: **Amiga, ST, PC, C64** ■ Developer: **BEGC** ■ Year: **1989**



The concept is good (help some kid trapped in his dreams to find his way back to reality), and the action begins in a candyfloss machine and gets progressively more nightmarish – giant wasps, malevolent halls of mirrors, fights with flowers, fights with nasty ro creatures (using a big fish as a weapon), attacks from man-eating footballs and man-shredding lawnmowers. Whoever designed and saw this game through clearly has some acquaintance with certain psychedelic flora. Or cheese.

ID
Format: **Spectrum** ■ Developer: **CRL** ■ Year: **1986**



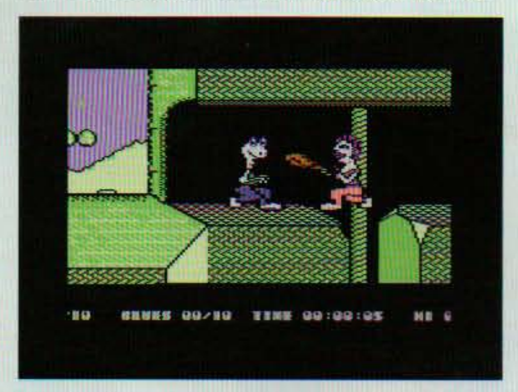
"I am the ghost in your machine," began *ID*. "And I will walk on your grave." No instructions, no explanations, no guidance… just a pale white screen with an input cursor and the word: "Yes?" *ID* is just about as bold as it gets – no graphics, no gameplay in the conventional sense. Just you, the cursor and a simple artificial-intelligence program which learns from the player's random ramblings. The trick is to build up the computer's trust and get it to slowly reveal itself. Abstract, open-ended and wonderfully intimidating. Like a text adventure with no locations, characters or plot. Actually, no it isn't. Or is it?

Beathead (Prototype)
Format: **Arcade** ■ Developer: **Atari** ■ Year: **1993**



You have to hand it to those emulator guys. Something the Atari stoners knocked up in a day or two and was barely released commercially – and there it is, all perfectly MAMEable and just gagging to be backed away from, slowly. *Beathead* is/was/nearly was a sort of twoplayer *Q*Bert* with a clunky control system and a plot like this: two slackers are watching TV when a skeleton jumps out and switches their heads with those of a toucan and a dog. Toucan Boy and Hound Head are then transported into the TV world where they jump about on hexagons. Somewhere in a parallel dimension, there's a Prototype-Only arcade packed with *Marble Madness 2* and Faster, Harder, More Challenging *Q*bert* machines, and where *Beathead* is worshipped by hardcore body-modification enthusiasts.

William Wobbler
Format: **C64, Spectrum** ■ Developer: **Wizard Software** ■ Year: **1986**



A long, long time ago in an economic environment far away, 8bit games suddenly stopped being £5.99 or £5.95. Some software houses developed the gall to maroon the cassette tape in the middle of a gigantic, posh (but cheap) box and charge a tenner for it. This happened with *William Wobbler*, partly because it was written by Tony Crowther – in, it would seem, a very tired and emotional state indeed. William is a grotesque ET character who shuffles about a murky gameworld with little purpose other than to jump when you ask him to fire and fire when you ask him to jump. Oh, and there's a bit where a rudimentary shoot 'em up appears for no discernible reason. Fascinatingly aloof.

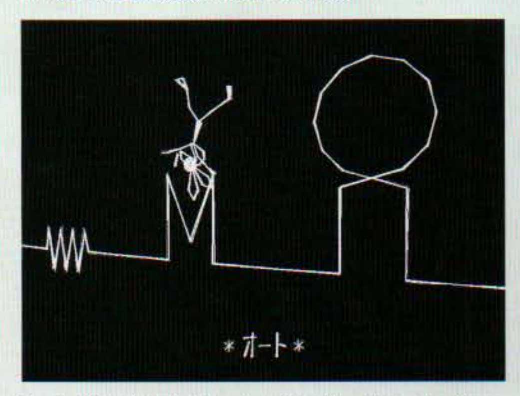
Seaman
Format: **Dreamcast** ■ Developer: **Sega** ■ Year: **2000**



Life has taken a distinct turn for the weird when you find yourself sitting alone, discussing intimate issues, via a little green lollipop microphone, with one of the man-faced fish from Monty Python's 'The Meaning of Life'. *Seaman* was an instant cult classic – a virtual pet game with added AI and a perfectly cast Leonard Nimoy. It's all about evolution, nurturing, trust and the dubious companionship of imaginary, man-faced fish friends. It might sound silly and gimmicky, and it is, but it's also surprisingly spooky, especially when ol' Seaman asks you to lean in close while he enquires, "So, do you like yourself? I bet you like yourself at least twice a day, eh?" Brrr.

Vib Ribbon

Format: **PSone** ■ Developer: **SCEI** ■ Year: **2000**



Now that 'Donnie Darko' has acknowledged the sinister side of rabbits, it could be time to dig out one of the most beautifully strange games ever created. A lateral, infinitely more skewed extension of creator Masaya Matsuura's previous rhythm 'em ups (*PaRappa the Rapper*, *Um Jammer Lammy*), *Vib Ribbon* is a game with soul. Or blues. Or metal. Or, if you prefer, jazz. Despite its perfect blend of oddness and infinitely customisable gameplay, it was criminally undersupported and had to make do with poxy old cult status. This must be corrected with the PS2 'sequel'.

Gerry the Germ Goes Body Poppin'

Format: **C64, Spectrum** ■ Developer: **Firebird** ■ Year: **1985**



One of those classic pub-chat concepts that spirals and spirals until, by the end of the evening, everyone is convinced that it's the greatest thing since chess. The eponymous blob of bacterial filth has been kicked out of Disease School and must prove himself by squirming and infecting his way through a treacherous human body until he reaches the heart where, according to the charming instructions, "he must cause a massive coronary." Tasks include depriving cute little corpuscles of oxygen in the lungs, mischievously causing massive kidney failure and (extra ick points, here) wreaking toxic havoc in the bladder – on a rowing-boat in a beautiful pea-green sea of urine. Nice idea, shame about the execution (it's too fiddly and over-egged). Gagging for a remake, though.

Yakiniku Bugyo Bonfire!

Format: **PlayStation2** ■ Developer: **Media Entertainment** ■ Year: **2003**



The notion of on-the-fly customer satisfaction hasn't been effectively game-ified since the likes of *Tapper* 20 years ago. And we haven't seen food anthropomorphised since *Burger Time*. *YBB!* is a more straight-up tale of life on the sweaty side of the flesh-flipping business. It really has no right to be much good, and it isn't (the raw ingredients pop up too randomly – like *Tetris* with salad bits instead of shapes). But it will make you both smile and salivate, which is a pretty universal idea of fun. There's certainly scope for an arcadey, resource-managing, irate diner-juggling barbecue sim with plenty of varied challenges (multiple location/weather grief, vegetarian militants, tipsy teenagers…).

Pimania

Format: **ZX81, Spectrum** ■ Developer: **Automata** ■ Year: **1982**



In the early-'80s, the antics of Mel Croucher's Automata lent the geeky UK home computing scene an air of much-needed, KLF-style mischief. In a masterstroke of self-publicity, Croucher – and partner Christian Penfold – claimed to have buried a valuable "golden sundial" somewhere in England. They released a game – *Pimania* – which served as an insanely cryptic treasure map. The sundial was real, the game – deeply, deeply surreal. Both high-art and highly camp, it forces the player to think through problems in a lateral, childlike way. Frequent hindrance is provided by the Piman – a sort of pink Mr Noseybonk, only scarier. A triumph of grand gesture, dastardly design and downright silliness. Will we ever see its like again?


THE
FOURTH
QUARTER



As the videogame industry prepares to double its output for a fourth-quarter face off, **Edge** examines why publishers are so hung up on Christmas and whether too much of a good thing can really be so bad

Every year **Edge** witnesses the scheduling habits of our industry with a kind of resigned disbelief. For nine months of the year there is something akin to a new-release drought. Then October arrives, the entire publishing industry springs dramatically to life, and the floodgates open. With big-name franchises, eagerly anticipated sequels, and a remarkable amount of new product all unleashed on the marketplace, there seems to be something for everyone.

But not everybody enjoys a merry Christmas. Consider the number of titles released across the formats in 2002: 455 during the first quarter, 518 in the second, 714 in the third, then an astonishing 883 in the final quarter. The corresponding sales figures – £288.11 million, £201.40 million, £167.04 million and £453.30 million – suggest the strategy of pushing out so much in the run up to the holiday season pays off. A closer look at chart performance paints a more complex picture.

In the first half of the year a number one title will shift 40–50,000 units a week. One holding the number ten position will sell 6–7,000. In the third quarter the field levels out a little, with sales in the lower regions remaining steady but sales of the number-one title dropping. Then comes the fourth quarter. A typical number ten sells 15,000 a week, while figures for a number one (last Christmas, at least) suddenly top 120,000.

Clearly the lion's share of the extra fourth-quarter revenue is going to a select few publishers, beyond which too many new releases chase too little money. Yet come New Year, it's business as usual. The release schedules peter out and the cycle starts anew.

Why do so many publishers persist in chasing the Q4 dream? **Roger Bennett**, director general of industry trade body ELSPA, suggests they simply follow the pattern set by other markets fuelled by disposable income.

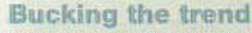
"Tell me which consumer markets ignore the Christmas period," he says. "There's DIY possibly, cars, and summer clothes, but I can't think of any others. It's the time when most people spend more money that at any other time in the year and games have enormous gift potential. That does not



The appearance of gaming's biggest sports titles, *Pro Evo 3* and *FIFA 2004*, only a week apart in the run up to Christmas impacts on many crucial aspects. A *Madden* requires less consideration







Bucking the trend

Released in September 2002 on PC, Xbox, GameCube and PlayStation 2, *Conflict: Desert Storm* (below) went on to sell some 1.5 million units. The timing of its launch is indicative of publisher SCi's entire approach to publishing.

"We follow public demand by releasing our products throughout the year with a heavy emphasis on the spring and autumn periods," explains marketing director **Dave Clark**. "The results speak for themselves given the recent successes of *Futurama*, *The Great Escape* and of course *Conflict: Desert Storm II*."

It's an approach that has grown from the sales enjoyed by the non-Q4 release of the first *Carmageddon* several years ago. "Given this success, it goes without saying that our business model is geared around this policy," explains Clark. "This approach holds true regardless of the game type – own-branded product or licensed product. And having identified this, SCi publish when we are ready and are not dictated by competitor releases."



prohibit triple-A releases at other times but post Christmas to Easter and beyond the market currently can only sustain a small number of them."

Some suggest such the wild variance in quarterly sales figures is also attributable to a self-perpetuating cycle created by the publishers. More games are released in Q4, ergo more are sold.

"The industry is just following market demands," counters **Nick Baynes**, development director of Climax's Brighton studio. "If everyone bought more games in July than any other time of the year then that's when publishers would release the most titles – it would be suicidal to ignore the market's needs than to cater for them."

Roger Bennett admits there may be some merit in the argument of a self-perpetuating cycle, but says, "When the big fish are jumping, you want your line baited and in the water." With 883 titles released in the fourth quarter of 2002, there's an awful lot of fishing going on.

The music industry model

Despite being even more faddish and trend driven, the record industry has unequivocally grasped how to best utilise Q4. Labels have wised up to the fact that the best-sellers are those targeting the 'undecided' portion of the present-buying public. This is why best-ofs and compilations dominate the market. Not only does the industry recognise that original product doesn't require a Q4 release, it will often actively try to avoid it.

It's a lesson portions of our industry have in some way adapted. Filling their Q4 release schedules with familiar sequels and license-heavy software, shrewd publishers such as EA fully appreciate that the gift-buying public gravitate towards brands they recognise from other entertainment media and sport. Little wonder Codemasters has opted to leverage the brand loyalty of 17 different soccer teams for the marketing of its own *FIFA* rival.

"Publishers and developers should only aim for Q4 if they believe that their title will appeal to a secondary market other than their hardcore audience, which is to say appealing to people who are receiving their games as gifts at Christmas," says **Roger Walkden**, general manager of Activision UK. "The trouble is, this is often very difficult to predict."

"Everyone knows that in this business one percent of the titles make 99 per cent of the money," adds **Jason Avent**, game director on *Sudeki* at Climax. "The Christmas rush is a stupid time to release anything original or new because there will be at least ten franchise monsters to contend with." He goes further, frankly commenting that Q4 is the only time to release a blockbuster: "If you are in this position, you really should work to get it out between September and December, and forego quality for cold, hard cash."

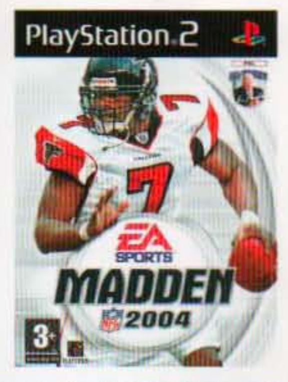
"In the last couple of years the consumer has got even more demanding for 'only the best games', so the disparity between those reaping the high rewards and everyone else is now huge," says Walkden. "Unfortunately publishers and developers have financial commitments to meet as much as any other company, and have to balance this against launching to a reduced consumer demand for a game of lesser quality. Hence the risk is now not just big, it is massive. Sometime it takes a few fingers to get burned before this gets realised."

The view from the shop floor

Over in the retail sector, the indies generally lack deep pockets and so rely on a steadie revenue stream throughout the year. Chains such as Game have it a little easier.

"Historically the industry has always ha quiet, busy, and very busy periods, and I don't think it's a negative issue on the whole," says **Simon Reynolds**, GAME group product manager. Yet he also sees the value in more evenly staggered product releases. "More sales are, of course, good for business, but like our customers we would like to see more quality titles achieve release dates at other times of the year."

Encouraging as it is that a chain such a GAME is able to stock and support the smaller titles alongside the blockbusters during Q4, their absence at smaller stores because of limited shelf space is worrying. means the independent retailer is unable to provide a comprehensive service to





customers, and though may lose only one or two sales of any one niche product, can find these soon amount to a sizeable chunk of lost revenue. It also spells trouble for any developer and publisher of such a title. Failure to be stocked by one smaller outlet isn't a big deal, but there are still a sizeable number of indies out on the high streets. An absence from these outlets can have a profound effect on total sales.

Even ignoring, for a moment, that hundreds of new titles are vying for limited shelf space, there remains the fact that publishers can only truly effectively handle marketing for a finite number of releases. "Publishers and developers are well aware that they need to make sure they don't over cannibalise their own sales by releasing all their titles in one month," opines Reynolds.

Yet Nick Baynes admits it's a concern for developers: "You have to hope that your product is going to be marketed well enough to stand out from the crowd. There is only a limited pot of marketing dollar each quarter, so if your client is releasing a plethora of other titles at the same time as yours then it stands to reason your marketing exposure will not be as big as it could be."

He believes the solution for developers lies in working to ensure the game is good enough to gain publisher recognition, resulting in a larger slice of the marketing budget, and thus higher sales. But this doesn't prevent over-saturation, it simply means other games in Q4 suffer instead. And recognising which work-in-progress titles are likely to deserve the strongest marketing has always presented something of a problem for publishers anyway.

Developers can also suffer when game development doesn't tally with the schedule laid down by the publisher's marketing plans. Indeed, even those that hand over code well before Q4 lose out.

"Developers have to do what they're told," points out **Ian Baverstock**, co-founder and business development director of Kuju. "We're scheduled to hit the milestones that the publishers want to hit and we do our best to hit them. If publishers want to ship at Christmas then that's what they do; we have no say in the matter. The biggest impact for us is when a publisher decides to sit on a product and delay its release, and consequently our royalty cheque."

And what about schedule changes in the opposite direction? Nick Baynes says that it's unusual for publishers to suddenly pull dates forward for Christmas once the contract has been signed. But what of games that have long been scheduled for a Q4 release, but which aren't ready in time? Deciding whether to let a product slip until the new year or ship it untested, or worse, incomplete, must be a difficult decision for publishers to make.

> "You have to hope that your product is going to be marketed well enough to stand out from the crowd. There's only a limited marketing pot"

Eidos's experience with *Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness* highlights this. Originally scheduled for release last November, the news that it and *Championship Manager 4* would not receive a Q4 release sent Eidos's share prices tumbling by nearly nine per cent. *CM4* has in fact gone on to perform superbly (launched in March it was the best-selling PC game of the year as of the end of September), but in the wake of poor reviews and sales for Lara's outing, the Eidos execs must wish they'd been able to capitalise on the licence goodwill available at Christmas time.

The developers **Edge** spoke to on the subject generally agree that companies are unlikely to go out of business due to Q4 pressures, but there are clearly additional development pressures with little compensation. Beyond the initial advance Jason Avent reckons it's very rare for developers to make money on Q4 releases,



While Electronic Arts favours a Q4 release for its franchise titles, its latest *Sims* title benefited from a mid-year launch. More recently it announced that *James Bond 007: Everything Or Nothing* is to be pushed back to the first quarter of 2004. EA claimed the extra time would allow for further tweaking of the code, though it's equally likely the publisher realised the game would simply be taking sales away from its other half-dozen key Q4 releases and would instead be better utilised to boost Q1 2004 figures

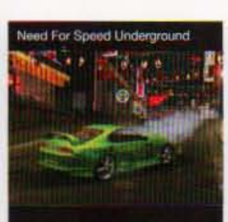


Peter Molyneux is no stranger to slippage. Having dropped key features from *Theme Park* in order to meet release dates, and redesigned *Dungeon Keeper* during the last few weeks of development, it came as no surprise when his *Black & White* project slipped from the Christmas 2000 schedules. Yet this was a game destined to sell at any time of the year, and its March 2001 launch ultimately did it no harm at all


Finding Nemo


The Simpsons: Hit & Run

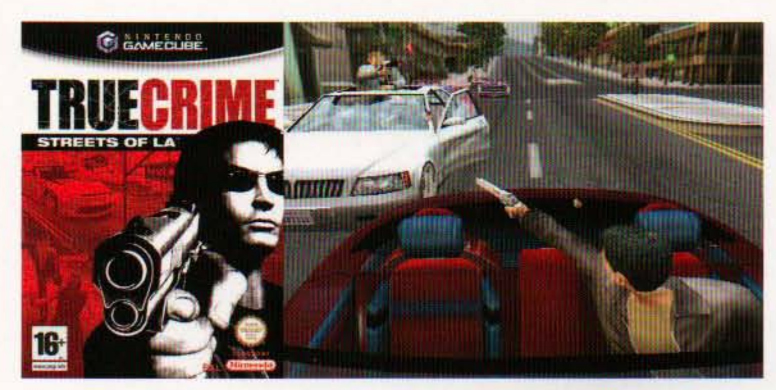

Mario Kart: Double Dash!!


Need For Speed Underground


Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs Death


The Sims: Makin' Magic


Prince of Persia The Sands of Time



Many would argue that games such as Activision's *True Crime: Streets of LA* and Namco's *Soul Calibur II* would sell well at any time of year, and yet both titles were scheduled for the stifled Christmas run-up slot





Urban Chaos (above) received enthusiastic pre-release press, generous marketing and solid review scores. This failed to translate into sales because it hit an overcrowded Q4 market

Sales breakdown

2002 All format number of releases
Q1: 455
Q2: 518
Q3: 714
Q4: 883

2002 PC software sales (million units)
Q1: 2.98
Q2: 2.41
Q3: 2.54
Q4: 4.27

2002 Console software sales (million units)
Q1: 6.79
Q2: 5.84
Q3: 5.33
Q4: 14.07

2002 Total sales (£million)
Q1: 228.11
Q2: 201.40
Q3: 167.04
Q4: 453.30

Note: Although Xbox and GameCube only arrived in March and May 2002 respectively, figures for the first three quarters of 2003 suggest a similar pattern with near identical sales.

All sales figures courtesy of Chart-Track (www.chart-track.co.uk)

even if they're lucky enough to be involved with an established Christmas-friendly brand: "The publishers of the franchise monsters are usually pretty tight on deals for external developers when working on flagship, established IP."

The Bermuda Triangle fear

There's no doubt a re-evaluation must take place. Publishers need to put less importance on shifting product in that magical three-month period. And to do so means they need to stop viewing the rest of the year as some sort of Bermuda Triangle in which even triple-A titles can simply disappear. Promisingly, it's something a select few publishers, such as SCi and Activision, seem to have grasped.

> "Just because it's Christmas doesn't mean a game will sell better. Yes, customers are in the shops, but they'll still buy want they want"



Would Blizzard's *StarCraft* and *Diablo 2* (above) have sold in such numbers if they'd each been launched into the overcrowded Christmas market, as was originally planned?

"Just because it's Christmas that doesn't mean a game will sell better, it just means that customers are in the shops, but they will still buy what they want to buy," states Walkden. "If a game is the best of its breed then it will nearly always sell, no matter what time of year it releases. The original *Star Wars: Rogue Leader* launched in a January, *GT2* in a February, *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* in March, *Soldier of Fortune* in April, *Driver* in May, *Medal of Honor: Frontline* in June, *GT3* in July, *TOCA Race Driver* in August, *Medieval Total War* in September. Good games do have a history of launching at any time of year and achieving great sales. These games do not need Christmas to enhance sales."

"The right time to publish non-franchise titles is when the quality of code is at its optimum and the market competition is minimal," agrees Avent. "I don't imagine all publishers will agree to work from a universally transparent release schedule but they'll begin to think twice about wasting opportunities in a crowded market. It's not rocket science. It's not even as hard as game development."

Perhaps the idea of a transparent release schedule should be taken seriously. Time and again the real success stories happen when quality product is shipped against minimal competition. Record labels have grasped the game-theory notion that the best results are achieved when competing factions are in accordance with one another, turning their rivalries to mutual gain rather than all battling for just one prize. The sooner our industry does the same, the better. Perhaps then publishers will fully appreciate that a gamer can be for life, not just for Christmas.



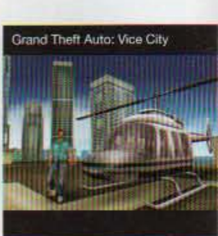












Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary

Edge's most played

Viewtiful Joe

The PAL release of Capcom's cel-shaded hero-sim had **Edge** dusting off its spandex in delight. The conversion is decent enough; easier but slower.



(GameCube) Capcom

EyeToy: Play

Having been cheated out of *EyeToy* at GDCE, **Edge** was forced to raid its piggy bank for a copy, but it's been well worth it, if only to humiliate younger relatives.



(PlayStation2) SCEE

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic

Worth playing, particularly for the Jedi training multiple choice options. **Edge** always attacks and asks questions later, so, that'll be a blue lightsaber, then...



(Xbox) LucasArts/Activision

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004

This month, **Edge** has mostly been bragging about its 402-yard drive and giggling about its freshly purchased breakdancing moves. Who knew golf was cool?



(Xbox, PS2, GC, PC) Electronic Arts

Playing in a winter wonderland

But can too many games be a bad thing?

You buy 14.4 games every six months and almost 29 games a year. That's according to **Edge**'s last reader survey. Stop and think about that for a moment. If you're a typical **Edge** reader you spend in excess of £1,000 on games per annum. One grand. Imagine what else you could get for that? A 32in widescreen television; a summer holiday for the family in Barbados; two Leeds United season tickets. Hmm, perhaps games are good value for money after all.

We're not just throwing out these statistics to highlight the excessive cost of videogames, but they do raise interesting questions. The first that strikes us is that if you do buy 29 games a year, then it's likely these purchases will be spread over the entire 12 months. Even taking into account that a good portion of your purchases will be made in the fourth quarter, let's say 11, that leaves 17 games bought during the other eight months.

But **Edge** is dumfounded as to what you would bother buying in, say, March. Looking back at the release schedule for that month you'd have been torn over the likes of *Vexx*, *Toe Jam and Earl 3*, *Rayman 3*, *Yager* and *Vietcong*. In fact, the only outstanding title released in the UK during that month was *Metroid Prime*. And as you're an **Edge** reader, you probably bought that on import.

Edge is guessing, but some months you buy a couple of games hoping for miracles, right? We've been there, we know how you must feel. Perhaps *Rayman 3* will be decent? It might not be amazing, but it'll probably be better than the five-out-of-ten stingy **Edge** gave it... You take it home and, well, it's okay. Nothing special. Two days later and you're back to the shop hoping that *Yager* will fill the gap. At the end of the year you realise you've spent £1,160 on games and only half of them are any good.

For hardcore gamers the Q4 publishing craziness is absurd. To have the lion's share of triple-A and blockbuster titles coming out in one period means you'll never have the time to fully appreciate them all. Unless you're still at school or unemployed, which then begs the question: where did you get all that money from? Perhaps **Edge** is in the wrong job.



















Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg

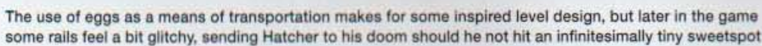
Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Sonic Team** Price: **£35** Release: **November 7**










The use of eggs as a means of transportation makes for some inspired level design, but later in the game some rails feel a bit glitchy, sending Hatcher to his doom should he not hit an infinitesimally tiny sweetspot



B*illy Hatcher* could've been the second best platformer ever. It's not. A shame, because it starts so well, the big, bold, primary colours and infectious football chant soundtrack – and of course the game's charming hero – providing an electric thrill that's sorely missing from so many by-the-numbers games. Early environments confirm this impression of a game that's been crafted with skill and passion but, somehow, it all gives way to a rather boring contest of wills, with a wayward camera during the visually impressive but ludicrally limited worlds that open up towards the end of the game.

"It offers the same sort of structure that the Super Mario series has exploited over the years but which Sonic Team has traditionally eschewed"

But first impressions are joyous and delightful. After a brief introduction to the rather hokey plot (which sees Hatcher charged with returning the sun to Morningland) players are initially presented with a series of big, brightly coloured, expansive game worlds. And, as with the best platform games, they're multipurposed: in each world, initial missions give tantalising glimpses of currently unreachable areas, and it's only after several missions have been completed that the overall topography of each world becomes apparent. It's the sort of structure that the *Super Mario* series has exploited with such panache over the years, but one that Sonic Team has traditionally eschewed. The extent to which it makes for satisfyingly packed spaces here would suggest that gamers have consequently been worse off.

The overall structure isn't the only novel departure for Sonic Team, though. There is, of course, the matter of Hatcher's eggs – a brilliant redefinition of the platform rulebook. Though the mechanics of character control and interaction with the game world are familiar, they are transformed by the use of ovoids. Throughout the game, different types are used variously as an incentive, a way of navigating the gamespace, a source of power-ups, and to hatch sidekicks that can be used to attack enemies and solve particular problems (one creature, for example, has a water-based attack which can be used to drench enemies just as easily as it douses fires that would otherwise hamper Hatcher's progress).

Rolling eggs is pretty uncomplicated. So long as Hatcher's moving forward he'll remain stuck to his egg, capable of jumping higher, rolling around and along rails, moving through hoops that whizz him around the landscape,













and attacking enemies. Rolling an egg over fruit gradually makes it larger (and more damaging) until it finally hatches (and provides an item or companion), but, logically, lack of care may reduce an egg to a squishy mess at the hands of an enemy attack or environmental hazard. What this extended range of actions and power-ups actually does is facilitate some truly imaginative level architecture and usher in a wide variety of mission objectives that range from standard boss battles to the slightly more unusual prospect of near-*Monkey Ball* levels of manoeuvring (albeit a more wonky version).

While this all works brilliantly during the first three or four worlds, sadly the ambition of the level designers eventually outstrips the capability of the camera, as it so often does during the latter stages of platform titles. In particular, the Circus Park and Sand Ruin worlds are structurally complicated edifices, yet the missions presented within them feel far more linear than anything that comes before. Increasingly restrictive design, in tandem with ever more extreme death-drops that must be cleared and finicky rails that need to be negotiated, eventually forces an unsatisfying amount of repetition over the course of levels that take too long to complete. More problematically, the camera, which copes reasonably well during the early stages of the game, simply doesn't deal very well with the increasingly intricate architecture of these worlds. Which comes as an unsatisfying denouement after such an exhilaratingly original and fulfilling start.

Still, the size and scale of *Billy Hatcher* mitigates against too much disappointment engendered by these disappointing later stages. Quite apart from the main thrust of the game (which is to complete at least 25 missions before completing the final level), there are many peripheral objectives that add to the entertainment. First, there are the 31 additional missions that can be completed. Then there's the gotta-catch-'em-all element of unlocking all of the eggs, of which there are over 60, some extremely well hidden. Then there are the Sonic Team eggs, which aren't hatchable until the hiding places of a certain number of gold coins are found across each mission. Or there's the score ranking, in which the time taken to complete missions, the number of enemies taken out





Cock-a-doodle Chu Chu

Among the more difficult to find (and hatch) eggs throughout the various game worlds are five containing downloadable GBA minigames. It's another example of the breadth of entertainment encompassed by the main game, since the acquisition of the minigames is challenging enough, and the games themselves are pretty enjoyable in their own right – and fairly impressive from a technical standpoint. **Edge**'s favourite happens to be *Chu Chu Rocket*, consisting of 25 Chu Chu puzzles, but there's also *Puyo Pop*, *NiGHTS Score Attack*, and two variants of a *Billy Hatcher* shoot 'em up.

"A couple of deathmatch modes are entertaining enough, but the real clincher is the Hatch mode, which expands the standard deathmatch goals"





Some of the pure platforming sections in *Billy Hatcher* are a bit harsh. *Jak and Daxter* has demonstrated the redundancy of providing players with a limited supply of lives; it's a shame Sega hasn't emulated it to offset this harshness. It's just a minor annoyance but it's still unnecessary

with combos or by sidekicks, and the number of eggs hatched contribute towards a ranking from 'D' to 'S' for each mission.

The major slice of added value comes from the game's awesomely entertaining multiplayer modes. A couple of deathmatch variants are entertaining enough, imposing all sorts of sidekick/powered-up mayhem, and reminiscent of *Mario Kart*'s battle modes. But the real clincher is Hatch mode, in which the deathmatch goals are expanded by scoring points for hatching creatures. As **Edge**'s resident camping expert turned his skills to cuckoo-like egg-stealing antics, it was clear that this is one of the most fiendishly engaging multiplayer modes in recent years, and goes some way to restoring the damage done by those later levels.

But not totally. Elsewhere this issue, *Voodoo Vince* is an abject reminder of how difficult platforming games are to develop – see the difficulties of retaining familiar gameplay themes without being derivative, and the danger of sapping any enjoyment with baroque level design. For this reason alone, *Billy Hatcher* deserves recognition. It's certainly not – as early previews would suggest – just for kids. It's simple, but not simple-minded. But it's impossible not to fee disappointed with a title that, to judge by its opening, ought to have competed on an even footing with *Super Mario Sunshine*. Instead it's an uneasy compromise between the splendour of early levels and the inadequacy of later missions. It's still a major achievement, but perhaps it would've simply been better titled *Billy Hatcher and the Curate's Egg*.

Edge rating: Seven out of te

Star Wars Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **Factor 5** Price: **£40** Release: **November 7**



The speeder bike section through the forest of Endor (right) looks pretty, but lacks dynamism. It rather reminds Edge of *Road Rash*, but without the fun



The 'Star Wars' licence is unquestionably the most abused in videogame history. For every *TIE Fighter* (see p112) there are ten titles of the calibre of *Masters of Teras Kasi*. And just as **Edge** had been heartened by signs of a LucasArts resurgence (with *Knights of the Old Republic*, **E**128, 9/10) comes this: a throwback to the bad old days of dodgy level design, rusty game mechanics and amateurish use of 3D space.

Rogue Squadron III makes BioWare's labyrinthine and masterly RPG seem like a LucasArts publishing fluke. Indeed, this should have been the perfect companion piece to that work; a game capable of engaging the action/twitch gaming side of the brain that BioWare's epic, naturally, didn't stimulate. It's all the more exasperating because Factor 5's distinguished *Rogue Squadron II* (**E**106, 7/10) should have been a platform for even better things.

Here, the decision to take the hero out of the cockpit has been disastrous. Approximately a third of the missions have a thirdperson 'action' element. Not since the early days of PlayStation and N64 can **Edge** remember a title that made so many mistakes with its use of 3D space. At no point does the player have manual control over the camera and only on rare occasions is the perspective viewed from a practical angle, namely behind the main protagonist.

Arguably, fixed camera points are adequate for slow-paced exploration titles, such as *Resident Evil*, but they are downright aggravating in games that require quick reflexes and speedy target acquisition. Forcing people to shoot enemies they can't see is a terrible way of framing a videogame experience; having them bump repeatedly into walls because the perspective, animation and controls are inept is insulting.

All the missions that stray from the *Rogue Squadron II* formula are poor. Riding a Tauntaun across the surface of Hoth isn't dire, but it's deeply unsatisfying; the speeder bike levels are insipid and irritating (pressing the 'B' button to shoulder-charge opponen is more of a detriment than a benefit); and t Jedi training and Sarlacc pit levels are broke beyond belief (see Use the 'B' button, Luke The only exception to this rule are the missions which see you piloting AT-STs. Th mechanical stork-legged movement has been captured brilliantly, and eliminating minute ground-forces with missiles and laser fire delivers some of the more rousing moments in the game.

You can understand Factor 5's dilemma how to develop another 'Star Wars' game that just doesn't re-hash what we've seen before. But this patchy melange of game styles wasn't a good idea. It could be said that these disparate game elements communicate a more comprehensive pictu of the 'Star Wars' universe. But that's being kind. After sampling every part of the game **Edge** came to only one conclusion: that

"Not since the early days of PlayStation and N64 can **Edge** remember a title that made so many mistakes with its use of 3D space"



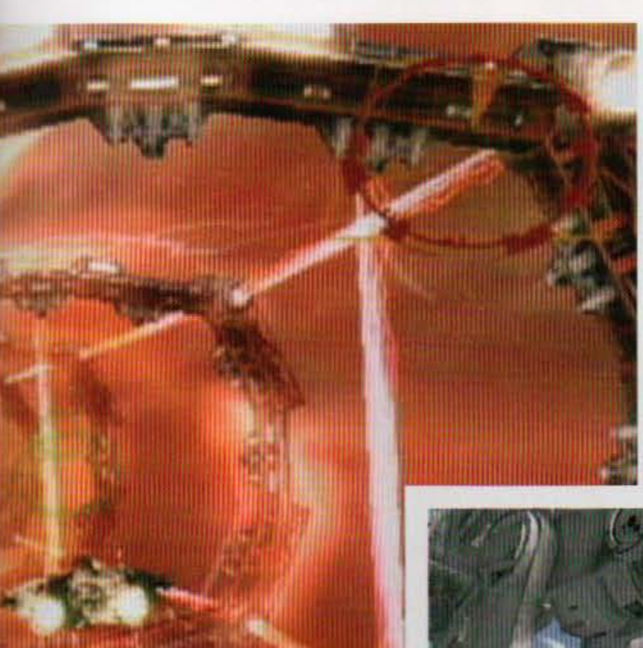


Use the 'B' button, Luke

Luke's Jedi training is hilariously weak. It amounts to a series of trials that include jumping over swamps and deflecting laser blasts with your lightsaber. This last technique could have been an interesting test of reflex skill, instead you merely keep the 'B' button pressed down and stand still. At least Yoda's tuition delivers the game's funniest line: "Jump again when you are in the air and double jump you will." The escape from the Sarlacc Pit is even more dysfunctional. Jumps from one craft to another must be timed perfectly, but the lack of manual camera control makes this sequence unfair and maddening.

XIII

Previously in E125, E128













Factor 5 should have stuck to the flight combat and TIE Fighter dogfights that made the previous two *Rogue Squadron* games so evocative. While there's still an insistence on prescripted mission objectives the X-Wing, Y-Wing, B-Wing, Millennium Falcon, Snow Speeder and TIE Fighter missions are engrossing and almost make the rest forgivable. It is with these that the major enjoyment of the game comes through.

At least the game structure is more open-ended. Instead of a strictly linear path, you can open a selection of missions by winning medals (three points for bronze, six for silver and ten for gold). The downside to this, however, is that the weak missions are not worth playing through again. They're hardly captivating the first time around and certainly don't get any better when you're under pressure to complete them in a quicker time or by getting a higher shot accuracy percentage.

There are welcome bonuses in the form of a Versus and Cooperative mode. Indeed, the opportunity to play all the missions from *Rogue Squadron II* with a friend is enticing, and does present a generous and welcome addition. Just how much you get out of this bonus largely depends on how much you played and enjoyed the previous game. For **Edge** it only marginally compensates for the bad design evident elsewhere.

There's a prevalent fashion at the moment for games to contain a multitude of game styles, a presumption that suggests consumers have become bored of single genre games. But *Rogue Squadron III* exposes the lie. It's a game that tries too hard to do many things but only manages to do a few of them well. It pains **Edge** to say so, but *Rebel Strike* joins the growing cannon of dodgy 'Star Wars' titles.

Edge rating: Five out of ten



The AT-ST levels are the best addition to the usual roster of *Rogue Squadron* dogfighting missions. Original film footage is spliced into the action, but long pauses only serve to break the game flow

XIII

Format: **Xbox (version tested), PS2, GC, PC** Publisher: **Ubisoft** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**



At a few points in the game it is possible to grab a hostage thus deterring enemies from shooting at you. Once they are secured by the neck, you must inch your way backwards until an escape route is found



God, it's gorgeous. Even when the inferior game elements begin to jeopardise your enjoyment you'll still marvel at this scintillating recreation of a comic book universe. **Edge** has seen it evolve over many months and caught it at different preview stages for nearly two years, but the aesthetic treatment still evokes admiration. Furthermore, seeing the game from beginning to end reveals its true artistic merit: it never gets stale; every episode has been drawn with minute care and attention. It would have been an incredible achievement if the gameplay had matched the outstanding art direction.

The most obvious flaw is the poor mapping of movement and targeting to the analogue sticks. Yes, **Edge** constantly bangs on about this, but it's staggering that developers still fail to calibrate targeting appropriately for console firstperson shooters. As the turning speed is constant (rather than accelerating out from the mid-point) there's a substantial 'dead zone' at the centre. These are analogue controls; if developers want a good model to copy, look no further than *Halo*.

"From the Appalachian mountains to a cliff-top sanctuary, XIII takes you on a cracking journey that unfurls with tight direction and clever plotting"

Such an oversight has a significant impact on the game. It's a constant struggle to shoot enemies with accuracy and even though there's a degree of auto-aim the frustration will soon mount. Such grievances are much more pronounced on the PlayStation2 version; the aiming accuracy is so inhibiting in fact, that you can knock a full mark off the score at the foot of this page. The Xbox controller copes best, while **Edge**, at the time of writing, has not received GameCube code to test.

It's a shame that something so fundamental spoils what would otherwise have been an excellent endeavour. Unfortunately for Ubisoft the poor targeting is only accentuated by the game's reliance on prescripted events. **Edge** has nothing against prescription – especially if progression and difficulty have been finely judged – but too many levels will see you restarting several times. This is all the more galling as cut-scenes and clockwork events cannot be skipped.

Despite these flaws *XIII* is curiously compelling. The espionage/conspiracy narrative is seductive and the manner in which comic book conventions have been framed within the videogame format is captivating. Some have important gameplay implications: note the 'tap, tap, tap' of enemy footfalls which advance and recede giving the player vital visual cues for the use of stealth. While most are gimmicks (the cut-away images of stealth kills soon pall) Ubisoft should be applauded for creating such an evocative universe; and one quite different to anything **Edge** has experienced before.

Previously in E112, E122, E125













The multiplayer maps are basic, suggesting that they were afterthoughts to the main experience

The sheer diversity of locations impresses too. Take a look at any of the latest WWII or sci-fi firstperson shooters and you'll discover a stultifying lack of variety and imagination in terms of scenario scripting and location setting (same old beaches, same old spaceships). From the Appalachian mountains to a secret cliff-top sanctuary, *XIII* takes you on a cracking journey that unfurls with tight direction and clever plotting.

Yet while the locations are varied, for **Edge**'s taste there are too many stealth missions. Many of these levels have goals that can only be satisfied if an alarm is not triggered. The erratic enemy AI only serves to underline these irritations. Sentries often stand around as their colleagues get pumped in the head with sniper shots; at other times they'll react by going into 'alert' mode – a condition that sees them running from side to side, only stopping for brief moments to let the player fire a fatal bullet.

After you've feasted on the main narrative, there are several multiplayer modes to chew on. PS2, Xbox and PC support online games for up to eight players, while GameCube users will have to make do with the fourplayer splitscreen version. These modes are completely uninspiring. The maps are small and the game modes and weapons are so traditional that you'll be stifling a yawn after the second bout. Another victory for the marketing men, but not for gamers who must be bored of bog-standard multiplayer modes cropping up in every game on the market.

No doubt *XIII*'s visual power hides a multitude of sins, but it would be churlish if we were harsher on a game that demands your attention up until the final frame and caption. It's art over game craft, sure, but still worth every minute of your time.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten



Deep frieze

XIII is a splendidly crafted package from beginning to end and particular credit should go to the music direction. From cool jazz to up-tempo 'tension' scores, the sound is married to the cel-shaded aesthetic perfectly. The auditory effects that enhance flashbacks are equally masterful, as are the nerve-jangling spot effects that can provoke physical jolts. **Edge**'s favourite? Let's just say that building snowmen will never be the same again.

Maximo vs Army of Zin

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house (Production Studio 8)** Price: **¥6,800 (£37)** Release: **Out now (Japan), March 12, 2004 (UK)** Previously in E12







There are over 30 fighting moves and combos in the game now, making for a more complex and satisfying combat experience





Wish you were here?

The first game did a witty and memorable job of transposing the traditional *Ghouls 'n Ghosts* greys, greens and graveyards on to the PS2, via all the archetypal platform environments. *Army of Zin* naturally retains the undead undercurrent and glows with visual wit and Susumu Matsushita's brilliantly charismatic designs. But its imaginative worlds and immersiveness easily outstrip what came before. There is far more range in the world design, and a rich fairy-tale subtext to the entire mood of the game. Superb environmental effects and some impressive engine-flexing views prove it's no technical slouch, either.





Enemies range from housed dragons (above) to powerful mechanoids (right), each with their own special attacks. Meanwhile, background detail is brash and stylised, perfectly replicating Matsushita-san's character designs



For those who played *Maximo: Ghosts to Glory*, the opening moments of *Army of Zin* will serve mainly as a reminder of how good the original was. But veterans are in fo a shock. The sequel may have sacrificed a little of *Maximo*'s knife-edge aura, but there's so much new here that it would be rude not to call *Army of Zin* even better.

Though some well-tuned, pulse-raising platforming puzzles must be completed to progress at key stages, there aren't as many protracted platforming sections as there wer in the original. Combat was a crucial elemen of *Ghosts to Glory*, but in *Army of Zin* it is both more elaborate and a significantly more dominant component. That's armies for you: they just keep on coming.

Zin's hordes are mostly mechanical beas – skeletal humanoids and hounds, hulking robots, etc – but there are killer ladybirds, angry houses and other inspired creations. There are distinct attack patterns even in rank-and-file enemies. Some have special moves that are slow to charge, but deadly if given time; others attack with missiles or self detonate. And the bosses – an inexplicably easy and underachieving area of the first title get far nearer to the heights of their vintage platform ancestors. To cope with these now ferocious threats, Maximo now has scores o powerful customisation options for his weapons, shield and pants, and the related option of several nicely apocalyptic, but power-draining, special moves.

The greater quantity and menace of enemies is not the only consideration during combat; now, villagers are strewn throughou the game. If they are reached in time, they'll give money or health as thanks, or else oper up their shop menus and reveal useful bonu items. Some might argue that this makes th sequel easier than the original, but the earlie game was never difficult for the sake of it, it just demanded precision and care from the player – and in this follow-up, keeping a careful eye on continues, checkpoints, life b and armour is still absolutely crucial.

This is a sequel that stands up, and ofte glitters, on its own terms, and the ingenious new adrenaline moments and set-pieces are worthy additions. The levels are somewhat smaller than their predecessors but there ar almost four times as many and their stylistic range has expanded in kind. Rampaging through them in Maximo's magic pants is one of the PS2 delights of the year.

Edge rating: Eight out of t

Ratchet & Clank 2: Locked and Loaded

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **Insomniac Games** Price: **£40** Release: **November 21** Previously in **E125**

It would be so easy to sneer at how both Naughty Dog and Insomniac Games have fine-tuned their titles to such a degree that they can be picked up and happily played by anyone. Putting aside for a moment just how much of an achievement that is, it would be doing the two companies a disservice by cheaply labelling their games 'massmarket'. Sure, *Ratchet & Clank 2* never fully takes the stabilisers off, but it exudes gaiety, sound design principles, and imagination.

At first you'll probably experience a slight sinking feeling as you enter the game, to smash crates, jump across ledges and become bored by the ease at which you defeat every creature and reach the next checkpoint. Things don't warm up until some significant upgrades and gadgets are discovered. As in the original, ammo and weapons can be bought in exchange for currency (represented by the nuts and bolts collected when anything is smashed), and the game's strength is that frustration is circumvented because the balance between currency gained and weapon/ammo costs has been judged brilliantly.

Naturally the weapons are the game's focus. There are over 25 in this sequel, not including the various gadgets that can be claimed along the way. Yet more isn't always better. It's a bit like getting an over-sized selection box – there are weapons that will soon become fond favourites and are used in most situations, but many feel like they've been thrown in to make up the numbers. Having to choose weapons from a separate menu is also unnecessarily clumsy and breaks up the flow of the action.

So while *Ratchet & Clank 2* sells itself on the back of freedom and choice, it's choice within rigid limitations. All the world's creatures can be damaged with any weapon, which in principle should encourage you to experiment. However, in practice, it's the big guns that always come out to play.

And as for plot, characterisation and cut-scenes? It's all done with the kind of polish most developers merely dream of achieving. The corny American humour will only appeal to children and, well, Americans, but it's hard not to marvel at the effort that's gone into every level and minigame.

It's anything but soulless, it's anything but bland, but while *Ratchet & Clank 2* conveys you along at a steady pace, it never feels truly electrifying.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









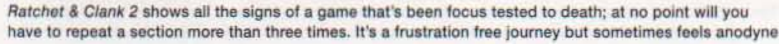




Insomnia believes the sequel has a darker tone, but it's hardly a 'Jekyll and Hyde' difference. There's been a move away from bright, primary colours but there's nothing shocking or jarring







Ratchet & Clank 2 shows all the signs of a game that's been focus tested to death; at no point will you have to repeat a section more than three times. It's a frustration free journey but sometimes feels anodyne

Drag-On Dragoon

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Square Enix** Developer: **Cavia** Price: **¥6,800 (£38)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)** Previously in **E120**









Each weapon has an associated magic attack, as does your dragon during aerial missions



Friends united

The main playable character is joined by various allies and supporters over the course of the game. Some of these are largely confined off-stage, though others join him on the field of battle. Thus, for a limited number of times in each battle and for a restricted duration, your character can transform into one of his allies, each of whom possesses various types of attack. Their assistance also makes it possible to replay earlier missions and unlock side quests.



The mythological setting is clearly influenced by European folklore, and has a soundtrack to match. At times the bombastic drum marches or shrieking strings can grate, but in general it adds an urgent tempo

The lazy way of describing *Drag-On Dragoon* would be to summarise it as a combination of *Dynasty Warriors*-style hack 'n' slash, with a more sedately paced, off-rails, shoot 'em up in the fashion of *Panze Dragoon Orta*. It's accurate as far as it goes, but as with all such shorthand, it fails to convey the real strengths of the game – the intricacies of control; the beautifully rendered world inspired by European myth; the relentless pace; the cinematically presented narrative that is Square Enix's forte.

The game is divided into a number of chapters, each of which host various missions cut-scenes, and isometrically viewed playable interludes. Although the game largely unfolds chronologically, some elements only open up when certain requirements have been met, lending a multifaceted feel to the narrative. But while Japanese speakers will benefit from the back story, it's not necessary to enjoy the substance of the game, which hinges around two types of mission.

The most immediate impression of the game's ground-based melee levels is one of sublime control. New weapons can be acquired over the course of the game, and upgrade automatically in tandem with their use, and although each has a very different way of handling, all encourage a succession of sashays from one combatant to the next on the field of battle in a bid to defend agains encircling attacks. A sense of urgency is partl inspired by a brilliant *Bangai-O* type dynamic, which sees players who immerse themselves in a throng of enemies rewarded with health power-ups, consequently veering from near failure to indomitable strength and back agair

If the action gets too frantic it's possible t eliminate enemies from the skies, but the disadvantage is that weapons don't upgrade – making later levels more difficult. There are also outright aerial levels, which it's only possible to undertake on the back of your dragon. And although the sense of handling isn't initially as intuitive as ground-based combat, it quickly does become second nature, utilising a target-lock to dispatch multiple enemies, and a magic attack to deal large-scale destruction.

If there is a criticism, it's the essentially unvarying mission objectives. In the hands of a lesser developer, it might have resulted in a monotony over the game's long life span That it never does is testament to *Drag-on Dragoon*'s excellence.

Edge rating: Eight out of te

Flipnic

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEI** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£38)** Release: **Japan (Out now), TBC (UK)**

Deformable landscapes, multiple level routes, context sensitive controls, impeccable camera control, inventive boss levels. *Flipnic* would be a hell of an adventure game. But it's not. What *Flipnic* is, "is a enjoyable simple-action amazing pinball game for you." That's what it says on the box, and that's what it does in the box.

Each of the four tables is themed, but the settings aren't just window dressing. Blasts from flying saucers jostle your ball on its way round the table, and giant chameleons threaten to lunch on the butterflies you have lured onto certain bumpers. It triggers a sense of exploration, an 'Alice in Wonderland' desperation to find out "where does *that* tunnel go?" Each table contains a clutch of missions – some simple pinball challenges, other effective minigames that remove the ball from the confines of the table. Once liberated, it develops a host of capabilities – firing laser guns, orbiting magnetic pegs and jumping for coin bonuses.

On the table, however, the physics is consistent and satisfying. Don't be misled by the small number of tables – the interlocking structures contain over 30 areas, many of which are conventional and elaborate pinball setups. Progress is controlled by completing missions, and finishing the challenges on each table unlocks a boss stage and a twoplayer pinball spin on conventional games such as basketball and football.

The game is uncommonly beautiful, the soft neon fuzz of Optics being the obvious standout. The mood of laid-back wonder is enhanced by some of the finest game music **Edge** has ever heard, and a honey-voiced lady who breathes encouragements into your ear. Flashcards announce the start of each mission with stylistic pastiches, and, for once, when you unlock the next level, what happens onscreen comes close to matching the flutter of excitement in your heart.

Since the driving force in the game is exploration, *Flipnic*'s longevity is questionable. Although the hi-score table beckons, the enormous size of the tables means that taking a wrong turn can lead to an exhaustingly epic detour. It's also very hard. Some missions require a combination of pinball skills and lateral thinking that might defeat all but the most determined.

Pinball purists may be non-plussed, their pastime invaded by UFOs. But it's not for them. Like the box says, it's for you.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten





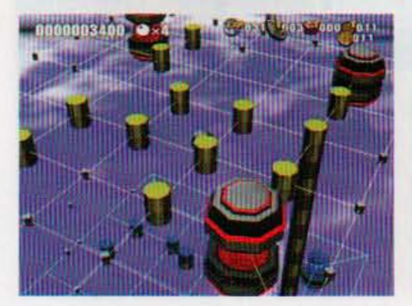


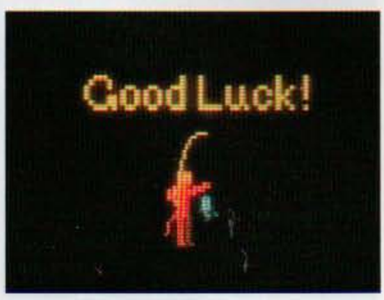






Learning the convoluted routes around each table can be a lengthy process, but the manual contains a simplified map for each of the worlds



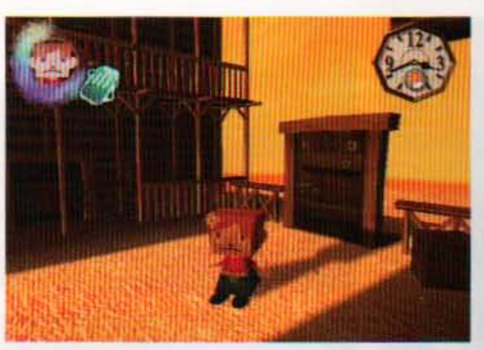


Size does matter. The bigger the fish the singing monkey of the intro screen catches, the better luck you'll have in the game, although **Edge** can't be sure exactly what aspects of the tables are affected

Gregory Horror Show

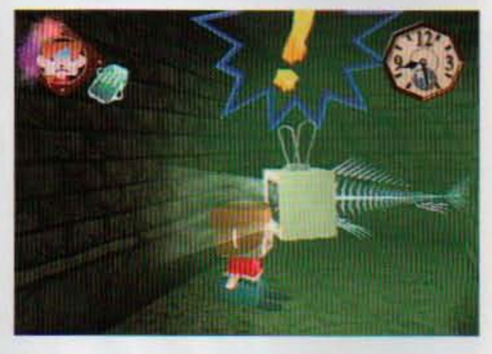
Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **November 21**

Previously in **E**121, **E**129









As the guests turn against you, avoiding them becomes a nerve-racking assault course. Fleeing one may lead you straight into another



Soul mining

The game requires you to collect souls – spying on characters, eavesdropping and learning their routines will allow you to figure out whether it's a task best accomplished by bribery, trickery, quick-thinking or out-and-out theft. Robbed guests are incensed, and for the rest of their stay you must use your map to steer clear of them. Should they catch sight of you they give chase and if caught, they'll perform a Horror Show on you. This terrifying and often invasive procedure can leave you permanently mad – *Gregory's* equivalent of Game Over.



The game relies heavily on the map which shows you guests' locations. Unfortunately, it doesn't update their movements, leaving you flicking it on and off to get a sense of where they are headed

"Didn't it make you feel bad? Knowing your grandson was looking at your book? Or did you find it... exciting?" It's midnight, and a zombie cat is musing over whether or not a grandfather might be stimulated by the notion of his eight-year-old grandson finding his porno stash.

Based on a successful children's cartoon in Japan and eminently suitable for younger players, **Edge** doesn't want to misrepresent *Gregory Horror Show*. The macabre and the sinister have always had their place in children's fiction and this game continues tha tradition, although there's no denying it adds new dimension of seediness to the mix. But for adults with their eyes open, *Gregory* breaks far more – and far more controversial taboos than the likes of *Postal*.

It's the character design that makes *Gregory* extraordinary. The concept, illustration, animation, scripting, voicing and plotting of each of the hotel's 15 guests is exceptional. Judgement Boy's trademark wa cry is destined to become one of gaming's icons, and the brilliantly ghostly TV-fish, whose head – well, **Edge** doesn't want to spoil it for you. The puzzles, while self-contained and simple, are never repetitive. Each is entertaining and inventive and, along with the Horror Shows, elaborates on the personality of each guest. By the time you've nabbed their soul, you really do feel you know them a little better.

Structurally, it's rather chaotic. Your ever-decreasing sanity gauge is recharged and extended by reading special books, but doin so causes time to pass, which adds to your tiredness. Combined with the unpredictable sleep system, and the overwhelming array of health potions, it leaves you juggling variables you barely understand. The strange escalatic of maladies – headaches, anxiety, melanchol darkness – and the specialist medicines needed to cure them can, thankfully, be largely ignored, though they may leave you with bleary eyes and a grumpy stomp.

This over-complication is a sign, perhaps that Capcom didn't have quite enough confidence in the depraved vibrancy of its characters and the tick-tock neatness of the puzzles. But the fact is that they're strong enough to carry the game on their own, and their strength means they can shake off these structural inconveniences, leaving *Gregory Horror Show* to be shiningly, bawdily, frivolously wonderful.

Edge rating: Eight out of te

Disgaea: Hour of Darkness

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Atlus** Developer: **Nippon Ichi** Price: **$45 (£27)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)**

"Strategy RPGs are about to get a serious kick in the ass," drawls *Disgaea*'s US box text. For once the hyperbole would be justified were there any other localised SRPGs on the front or rear horizon to aim the boot at. But titles in this, the most hardcore of RPG subsections, are scarce and few would argue any have bested Squaresoft's seven-year-old seminal benchmark, *Final Fantasy Tactics*. At first glance it appears the genre has stood perfectly still, as graphically and ideologically the two titles are virtually interchangeable. Indeed, much of what was said in **E**57's review of the former could be inserted here. However, developer Nippon Ichi has wisely saved innovation for the extreme gameplay and has effortlessly elevated the genre in doing so.

Like *Advance Wars*, battles are fought on grid-divided fields albeit from the isometric viewpoint. The primary innovation is that the player executes commands for specific units without ending his turn outright. Whereas previously you chose actions for all your characters at once, here you use each party member to their full advantage one by one before the computer has its turn. An addition that opens up a world of tactical opportunities.

Dauntingly, as initially only two predefined characters are placed in your control; you have complete responsibility for your team's creation and development. Maps are cleared, earning mana points to spend on creating as many new characters as you want, and assigning each a mentor. As characters develop you can move them across classes while they retain skills already learned, so, in theory, you can nurture the perfect team.

As well as the main story battles there's an item world section where you can literally enter and physically level up any item in your inventory, adding a mind-blowing depth of player control. The micromanagement is on a previously unimagined macro scale yet is accessible and coherent enough to draw you in, making hours of concentrated playtime pass like minutes. The story uncurls with anime charm and cross-cultural comedy that will delight its target audience. With a very different feel to the usual medieval SRPG fare, *Disgaea* lacks some of the polish of Squaresoft's crown holder. But its strength lies in gritty, compulsive complexity – **Edge** can only admit that the genre has a new king. Unfortunately, devoid of *Final Fantasy* licence there will be few to rule over.

Edge rating: Nine out of ten







The ability to choose between US dubbed and original Japanese voice acting is a welcome option long overdue in DVD format gaming



Disgaea has been a massive success story in Japan where the game has a huge following. However, a PAL release is not expected and the limited US print run ensures its scarcity

Governing bodies

There are many sublime gameplay elements to the strategy that must be experienced to be properly understood. The government system (whereby you must convince a council to pass bills for everything from better shop items to wider stock) is very well implemented and you can build and destroy relationships with specific councillors as you please. All the battle maps encourage deep thought before execution, with panel status effects adding a consuming puzzle element to your topographical manoeuvring.

Commandos 3: Destination Berlin

Format: PC Publisher: **Eidos** Developer: **Pyro Studios** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E112**









The levels are stunning but the exclusively European setting means they lack the exoticism that made the earlier games so memorable



Interior monologue

The only area where *Commandos 3* could be said to have genuinely improved on what went before is in its representation of building interiors. Rooms and corridors are now rendered in sharp accelerated 3D rather than the pixelated software mode of old. Although much easier on the eye, the chronic shortage of interactive elements and portable goods in indoor environments quickly discourages exploration and experimentation.



Operatives include a cut-throat green beret, a nimble thief, and a molotov-slinging sapper. However, *Commando 2*'s seductress, driver, and canine assistant have all been pensioned-off

The fact that in the two years since the release of the deservedly popular *Commandos 2: Men of Courage* only one obvious clone has appeared seems strange until you learn just how long Pyro's artists spent creating each of the game's expansive exquisitely detailed isometric landscapes. Considering all the effort that went into crafting the levels it wasn't all that surprising that the designers then made cleansing them of hostile German or Japanese troops such tricky and time-consuming business.

In *Commandos 3* the painstaking, puzzle-like nature of the action has changed very little. Generally the player is provided with two or three personnel, each with their own equipment and skills, and tasked with clearing a locale using a mixture of deception, distraction and destruction. What has altered most noticeably is the size of the maps which are now rather cramped compared to their predecessors. Factored together with missing bonus missions and ditched difficulty levels, the downsizing means fans will hit the Normandy beaches (the last of the dozen levels) perhaps 50 hours earlier than they emerged from the stinking Paris sewer at the close of *Commandos 2*.

Further signs of shrinkage and stagnation surface in the barracks where a slashed specialist roster offers no new faces, and in the quartermaster's store where the great majority of kit is found to be recycled from the previous outing. Those who missed *Men of Courage* will not notice the myriad small ways in which interface and secondary screens have deteriorated but they will surely be taken aback by the lack of any means of changing the 800 x 600 resolution.

Ignorance of Pyro's past glories is actually an advantage with *Commandos 3* since it means the tension and atmosphere that the series still has in abundance can be enjoyed without the nagging feeling that things aren't what they used to be. The satisfaction that comes from luring a sentry to his doom with a tossed pack of Gauloises, or infiltrating a heavily guarded Nazi HQ in a purloined uniform has diminished little since the series first sneaked onto shelves in 1998. There's still no other strategy title **Edge** can think of that creates a sense of period and place more effectively. All the more unfortunate then that inspiration and aspirations appear to be in such short supply in the *Commandos* camp.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Vega$: Make it Big

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Empire Interactive** Developer: **Deep Red** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E127**

Where the conventions of a genre have been long laid down, innovation and critical success involves breaking the bounds of said genre. However, the management sim has changed little since the days of *Railroad Tycoon*, except in two areas; scale and subject matter. While not stretching for the advances that would garner critical plaudits, *Vega$: Make it Big* goes to the instinctive next level by stretching these two variables.

The mechanics are simple; buy a plot on the Vegas strip and build yourself the finest lot known to mankind. You macromanage; erecting a hotel, casino and shops, and decorate the area. Then you micromanage, by changing everything from the price of the buffet, to the type of car on the prize slots, to the quality of the cleaning staff. It's all familiar from *Theme Park* and *Monopoly Tycoon*, and *Vega$* adds little to the genre, except from upping the scale; there's up to 5,000 gamblers, each with individual preferences. Yet, remember, numbers don't make a game; people make games. (Or is it games kill people? **Edge** forgets.)

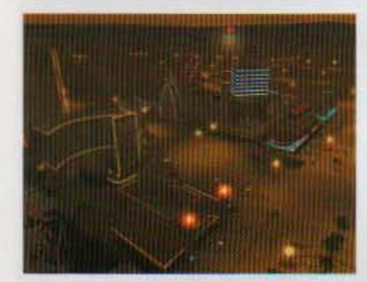
After *The Sims*, there's not enough creatable content in *Vega$*, which is surprising considering the variety of its subject matter. The campaign only has ten levels (all similar – they are set in Vegas after all) and, though the sandbox mode stretches off into eternity, it still feels short, specifically considering the lack of multiplayer. This lack of diversity is explained by the themes each lot can have; there are ten of them, ranging from Dinotopic to Mayan, and each item on each lot, from the bins to the rollercoaster, looks different; indeed, Empire promises an editor, and free-to-download custom themes will be available soon, involving the actual Vegas casinos. This level of detail and care for the modding community may be laudable, but it doesn't always compensate for the lack of boxed playing elements.

The greatest pleasure in *Vega$* doesn't come from the playing. It comes from sitting back in 'wander mode' (a pleb's eye view), strolling into shops, or watching the traffic go by; from Texan whales to showgirls, there's plenty of colour on the street (Vegas' seedy side is excluded), and the variety of themes makes exploring the strip compelling.

Vega$ pushes the stagnant tycoon genre as far as it can go, and is currently the best looking management sim available. But how far can you flog a dead Elvis?

Edge rating: Six out of ten







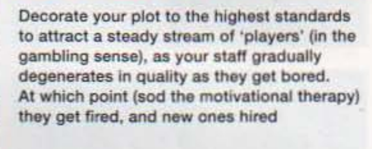
Decorate your plot to the highest standards to attract a steady stream of 'players' (in the gambling sense), as your staff gradually degenerates in quality as they get bored. At which point (sod the motivational therapy) they get fired, and new ones hired







To catch the big bucks you need to attract the flush VIPs into your casino, like the International Spy, Italian Businessman, or Female Celebrity, who only play on certain high-stakes tables





Lathing Las Vegas

The most unusual element of management simulations is that on top of an accurate business simulation, and a challenging campaign, they tend to allow the expression of creative impulses. For example, the sandbox mode in *Vega$* allows you to play around indefinitely with your casinos. You choose a section of the strip, and fettle, tweak and adjust until you have something resembling a work of art, whether it's through the organisation of the population flows, or in the layout of the theme.

Final Fantasy Tactics Advance

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **Square Enix** Price: **¥5,800 (£32)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**













The law system is an interesting twist, if a little unsuited to a portable game, since forgetting what's banned between one bus journey and the next can earn you a costly red card







Spells and summon attacks affect different areas – group your men together to perform a mass Cure and risk a mass Fira on the next turn. Expensive Totema attacks punish all the enemies on the map

Anyone who's spent half an hour at a time fiddling around with their Materia set-up will tell you that *Final Fantasy* games have always been plenty tactical. The visible change with the *Tactics* series is the isometric battlefield, but the terrain isn't what has a penetrating impact on your tactical decisions. Attacks from behind have a better hit rate, but the percentages are clearly displayed, which encourages more of a trial-and-error approach. Complexity instead comes from the system of laws, which prohibit a couple of attack types every battle. To balance this draconian system, the Judges (mounted on chocobos) who enforce the laws also hand out bonus stars for kills and the use of recommended attacks. These can be spent on forceful team-up attacks, and on summoning the *Tactics* spin on the inevitable *Final Fantasy* big bads, the Totemas.

But all in all, it's more a case of 'Strategy Advance', since the bulk of your thinking will be spent on planning the long-term structure of your team rather than on play-by-play manoeuvrings. Each of the five races has a different range of jobs open to them, and each job provides the opportunity to learn that Holy Grail of recruitment agencies – transferable skills. Constructing a career path to assemble the best roster of attack, reaction, support and combo skills is absorbing and satisfying. Meeting enemies employed in jobs not yet open to your fledgling mages and soldiers spurs you on to find out the mysterious potential of Gadgeteers, Alchemists and Assassins.

The game starts slow, a feeling exacerbated – or perhaps caused – by the easiness of the battles. **Edge** was more than 20 hours in before coming close to losing a fight. And while the over-arching narrative is laudably unobtrusive, it's also rather slight and uninvolving. The mission structure makes the game branch out uniquely for each player, but it's a system that has a tendency to become a little repetitive. The menu layout doesn't help – often unintuitive and occasionally uninformative, it can hamper your tactical genius.

But you'll play it and play it. Every time you try to stop you're just one battle away from mastering that skill, for earning that new job. And once you're deep enough in to have all the variables working together, they generate enough fascinating intricacy to overwhelm the flaws.

Edge rating: Seven out of te

Border Down

Format: **Dreamcast (version tested), Arcade** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **G-Revolution** Price: **¥5,800 (£32), (¥7,800 (£42) with OST & mouse mat)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Previously in **E113**

For a supposedly departed genre, the traditional 2D shoot 'em up is strangely active – almost to the point of resurgence. Allegedly a response to fanboy petition, G-Rev (a softco formed from ex-Taito programmers) has transferred its horizontal blaster, *Border Down*, from NAOMI to Dreamcast, despite the obvious limitations in both appeal and sales. Let no one say Sega's white box is 'dead'.

As with similarly recent examples, G-Rev has sought to inject a degree of invention into what could otherwise be considered a rather ordinary horizontal shooter. A rapid-fire/self-guided laser, digital-only control and three-way ship speed complete the obvious parts of the picture. However, the game layout is more complicated, as each of the six levels has three areas, both horizontal and vertical. The latter areas are the 'borders', green, yellow and red, each successively tougher than the last and with a varied environmental nature. From the outset, you can choose which border to launch into, but losing a life restarts that area in the border below. Roughly translated, this is the incentive not to get hit, although expiring in the third area rebirths the ship where it was destroyed.

However, it is in the scoring stakes that *Border Down* shows its cunning. Reaching the 'par score' for any level allows a choice of borders at the following area – ordinarily, the exit border must be the entry border for the next level. Moreover, the yellow and red borders double and triple the values for downed enemy ships, while timing the demise of a mayor to coincide with a 'zero' reading on the accompanying countdown delivers yet more numerical rewards.

The net result of such innovation? Trace, but little presence. Admittedly, G-Rev's outing has ticks for all the requisite ingredients of a shooter, but misses the most important: energy. Defensibly, Dreamcast is faultless in the execution, the visuals grandly imitating the bastard child of *Einhander* and *Philosoma*. Control is impeccable and the difficulty level takes no prisoners – player inability is certainly not on its list of concerns.

But there's no denying that *Border Down* lacks the intensity that pervades the true frighteners of the genre; *Hellfire*, *Thunderforce IV*, *Gradius Gaiden*, et al. There is much to be enjoyed, but the action never really panics; always short of the digital rage that makes your hands sweat. And a shooter that doesn't scare just isn't doing its job.

Edge rating: Six out of ten







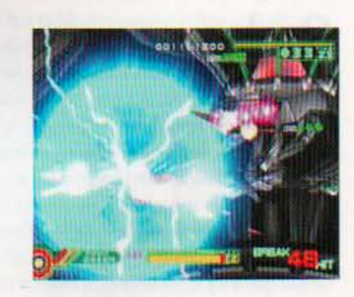
The last release for the Dreamcast? Possibly, possibly not. Either way, **Edge** will continue to keep an eye on Sega's resilient platform should anything else of interest turn up







Unlike other examples of the 2D shoot 'em up genre to have surfaced recently, *Border Down* plays (mainly) horizontally. But like its contemporaries, it demands exceptional eye-hand coordination



Ever-increasing circles

Using the all-engulfing 'Break Laser' is governed by a gauge filled either by collecting floating spheres or naturally-passing time. Firing the weapon results in a massive blast of plasma that vanquishes all in its path and the more targets destroyed, the greater the score multiplier, often exponentially so. Better yet is the result when fired against bosses with their own 'Break Lasers', the ensuing clash creating a huge ball of destruction that virtually kills on contact. Accuracy and timing are important, but not so much as ensuring the gauge doesn't run out mid-blast.

SSX3

Format: **PS2 (version tested), GC, Xbox** Publisher: **Electronic Arts** Developer: **In-house (EA Sports)** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**125









Big air, big points. While the game seems less energetic than *Tricky*, it's still a caricature of the sport, in keeping with EA Sports' Big branding. Hyperactive audio splashes mark every event, while a *GTAIII*-style radio station keeps you informed of mountainside news

The decision to sedate and reinvent *SSX* is a curious one. But EA isn't the company it once was – increasingly placing a selfless emphasis on quality over soulless reiteration, its titles increasingly evident in snobbish gamers' collections – and this is a brave move that deserves to work in its favour. And, in truth, the reinvention is slightly misleading, since *SSX3* still includes all the elements that made its forefathers so much fun.

As such, there's no real point in discussing the race and trick components, since they're fundamentally the same as always. The biggest addition is the inclusion of collectables from each course, which provides a great incentive for exploring in Freeride mode, and brings a touch of *Amped*'s atmosphere to a game that was all about the rush. These tokens provide cash, and, while developing your character works the same as ever, the shopping aspect is more sophisticated, bringing the game close to *DoAX*'s happy mix of aesthetic accessorising. It's this that proves compulsive in the long term, and gives owners of the previous games a reason to purchase this one, too.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Banjo Kazooie: Grunty's Revenge

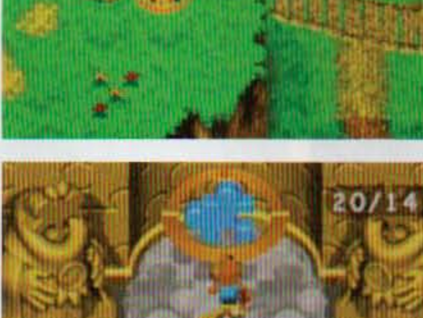
Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **THQ** Developer: **Rare** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**

Collecting stuff. It's been a motivational device in videogames since the *Manic Miner* era. Collect the food, collect the stars, collect three pieces of the Great Key of ACG. But when does collecting stuff become a chore rather than a spur to action? It's the question you'll most likely be asking yourself during turgid collectathon *Grunty's Revenge*.

Open up the option screen and you'll discover just how much there is to find. Eight different commodities, anything from Jiggies (which will be familiar currency to Rare fans) to musical symbols. But just as in *Star Fox Adventures*, most of these collectables seem to be superfluous to the main quest. Let's be clear about this: collecting stuff just for the sake of it, with no pay-off other than unlocking a new area is boring.

Rare's strong production values shine through and the 'humour,' jangly music (thankfully it can be muted) and ease of play clearly earmark this for a younger audience. But while there are some interesting mini-games to break up the wandering, *Grunty's Revenge* is mainly an abject lesson in breadcrumb following game design.

Edge rating: Four out of ten









Mumbo Jumbo can turn Banjo into several different types of animals. See a hole too small to fit through? Just get your witch doctor friend to cast a spell and turn you into a mouse. It's a neat device, but one we've seen too often

Time Crisis 3

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **Namco** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E119**

So you've plugged the GunCon2 in, calibrated it and positioned yourself about six foot from the screen – hey, **Edge** doesn't cheat. You've been here before, of course, so you'll know what to do from this point on.

Little has indeed changed in the six years since the first *Time Crisis* appeared. The sole game dynamic still relies on leaping out from hiding places unloading your weapon into an army of evil individuals and then ducking back into cover to refill your magazine. While accurate, quickfire shooting is important, so is knowing when to duck away from incoming fire.

Namco has added three new weapons – shotgun, machine gun and grenade launcher – which are selected by shooting while in the duck position. In practice, they add little in terms of a tactical aspect to *Time Crisis 3*, as you tend to just start with the best weapon and use it up until you're left with the default handgun. Theoretically you could use the latter on weaker enemies and save the grenades and shotgun for harder boss characters, but in reality you don't need to. Just go wild and have fun with them while it's still a novelty.

Edge rating: Six out of ten









Another decent GunCon arcade experience from Namco, which shoots all of the (now very familiar) lightgun game boxes. Fun for a while, certainly, but there are no surprises

Hardware: Online Arena

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **In-house (London Studio)** Price: **£40** Release: **November 5** Previously in **E112**, **E127**



The vehicle physics are excellent, and even the larger tanks can be launched from high ledges with no fear of damage. Only missiles and bullets sap energy, so getting to the most potent pick-ups is important







If *Hardware* is anything to go by then console online gaming is in a lot of trouble. That's not to say the game is bad – far from it – but this kind of conservatism is not going to kick-start any kind of network revolution. Imagine it: big tanks roaming around huge arenas. Deathmatch, King of the Hill, health pickups, eight vehicles to select from. We've been here too many times before.

Technically the game excels. There's little sign of lag, voice communication (via Sony's own headset) adds to the competitive spirit and the bouncy vehicle physics suit the environments perfectly. It feels simple at first, but it is possible to increase your potency and strategic capabilities by selecting 'rotating turrets' in the options menu.

Admittedly, it's early days for Sony's online ambitions but *Hardware* is as cautious a networking proposition as you could imagine. It will appeal to people who already like online games, but even they will soon want something more imaginative and substantial. And if you've never been involved in an online session before, you'll wonder what all the fuss is about.

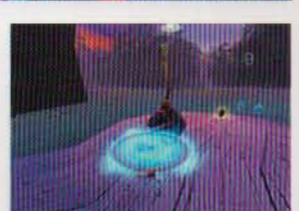
Edge rating: Six out of ten

Voodoo Vince

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios** Developer: **Beep Industries** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**125



One example of how *Voodoo Vince* gets things wrong is in a thirdperson *Frogger*-style minigame. Of course, in *Frogger* an overhead perspective enables you to see what you're doing...







The fact that *Voodoo Vince* breaks at least three of **Edge**'s Ten Commandments (**E**129) isn't exactly damning. But unskippable cut-scenes, a lengthy restart process and no camera centring are just examples of a broader malaise. Fortunately the soundtrack can be switched off, as the noodly lounge soundtrack initially sounds quirky and inventive but quickly begins to grate. *Voodoo Vince* offers plenty of imagination, but little in the way of enjoyment. For all its superficial novelty, this is the same by-the-numbers game.

A mechanical and lacklustre structure is only accentuated by Vince's predictable wisecracks. As he laments the formulaic impositions of the game in successive cut-scenes, it only serves to remind you how much of a chore it is to play – and raises the question; why does every platform hero have to be a wiseguy? Even the game's single distinguishing idea, of Vince inflicting damage on others commensurate with the amount of damage he inflicts on himself, doesn't quite work, functioning either as a scripted puzzle solution or an unvarying smart bomb.

Edge rating: Four out of ten

Worms 3D

Format: **Xbox (version tested), PS2, GC, PC, Mac** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Team 17** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**125

Shorn from external influence, *Worms 3D* has not been developed to modern rules. It feels like an Amiga game backed by modern hardware, which, essentially, it is. Simple, charming, and quintessentially British, it has no ambition beyond bringing the *Worms* form into three dimensions, and entertaining consumers with a classic videogaming dynamic. Players take it in turn to fire missiles at each other, gauging the angle and velocity of each shot, and cooing with excitement as the missile arcs towards its target.

But *Worms*' appeal lies in its breadth and flexibility. Every aspect of the landscape, weapons, game rules and the worms can be configured, and at first this is overwhelming. In time, though, manipulating anything and everything stretches the multiplayer appeal further. Singleplayer is weak – despite well-worked tutorial and mission modes it always feels like target practice for combat with friends – and the lack of online support disappoints. But despite a potentially hazardous dimensional switch, it remains as appealing a way of antagonising your friends as ever.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









***Worms* is a funny game – it's actually laugh-out-loud funny. Not just thanks to the vicious slapstick necessary to the game, but also because of the brilliant scripting and sound effects. It's a peculiar type of polish – warm and humorous, not bland and corporate**

Dynasty Tactics 2

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Koei** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **November 14**

D*ynasty Tactics 2* is essentially the same game as its predecessor. Even the most die-hard Tactician will be hard-pressed to pinpoint the precise impact of the various tweaks that have been introduced. Which makes the reviewer's task a difficult one; is it enough that a sequel still be one of the most cerebrally absorbing examples of the strategist's art, or must it be sufficiently different to command respect? Perhaps the real question to ask is this: is *Dynasty Tactics 2* any less enjoyable for being largely the same game?

And the answer is no; it's still superbly engrossing. The slow, considered bid to envelop enemies in complicated combos is enhanced by chain manoeuvres (which allow individual units to use more than one Tactic in a single attack), while city-based maps now grant officers the ability to visit barracks or mystics to acquire new items and skills. The major strengths of the original title remain undimmed; this is as consummate an example of Koei's design skill as its predecessor and every bit as enjoyable – in spite of having seen it all before.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten









It's not quick-fix gaming by a long way, but the considered build-up on both the battlefield and the city screen are as cerebral as gaming gets, and the satisfaction of dispatching an enemy general with an astronomically high combo is one of gaming's finer pleasures

Halo: Combat Evolved

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios** Developer: **Gearbox Software** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**125



Those expecting modern PC visuals will be sorely disappointed – the models and textures are identical to the Xbox versions. Attractive as far as it goes, but that far is a GeForce3 two years ago







Edge hailed *Halo* as the most important launch game of all time upon its debut. It's safe to say, two years on, that this PC conversion doesn't carry the same weight. To have been worth the wait for PC gamers it would have needed to considerably improve on the Xbox original. Put simply, it doesn't.

Which doesn't mean this isn't one of the finer gaming experiences available. While the dynamic is slightly altered by the superhuman turning speeds made possible by a mouse and keyboard system (most noticeably when Master Chief is knee-deep in The Flood) the general quality remains. The lack of quick saves is acceptable when the shield recharge system is so well implemented. Perhaps a little over-easy on the lower difficulty levels, but this doesn't make it any less enjoyable.

The majority of Gearbox's conversion work concentrated on the multiplayer, which allows 16 players over either a LAN or internet, with access to other vehicles such as the Covenant Ghost flyer. All welcome, but the lack of co-op play makes it a mixed blessing. Still, a devastating game in every sense of the phrase.

Edge rating: Nine out of ten



Super Hydlide

Edge takes a fresh look at a seminal game classic from yesteryear

Format: **Mega Drive** Publisher: **T&E Software** Developer: **Seismic Software** Release: **1990**





It's not that pretty, but one feature that *Super Hydlide* does have going for it is a technically accomplished soundtrack

The decision to create a sequel to *Hydlide*, a rather execrable RPG that appeared on the NES, is a baffling one. Having played through *Super Hydlide*, **Edge** is no clearer as to why it was taken, unless it was a bid to maintain the mediocrity of the series – in which case the game is a resolute success. At times it almost threatens to lapse into so-bad-it's-good sort of territory, but on balance it simply turns out to be just bad, in spite of some novel and intriguing game mechanics.

A rather screwball storyline starts off in the mythic environs of Fairyland, and, via some inexplicable plot meanderings manages to lurch from subterranean cities to alien spaceships. It's bizarre, to say the least, but it does retain an impressively archetypal air, as well as cooking up some fairly impressive set-pieces, such as a city hidden in the clouds, depicted with lavish attention to detail.

There are also some undeniably interesting ideas here, which haven't been seen before in a game of this type. For a start, time actually passes in the game world, so shops open in the morning and close at night, and monsters come out in droves during the dark hours. Your character also needs to eat regularly to maintain his strength (and it is a he; there's no choice of gender), and can only carry as much as his strength will allow. But these neat ideas actually just impose strictures on the player, limiting any freedom of action; having to return home because your bag's full only to find yourself waiting for the shops to open, for example, is intensely irritating.

Ironically, in spite of these constraints, the whole thing is crucially undermined by a lack of signposting and clear direction – to the extent that the whole thing feels very much half baked. A rudimentary combat system, poor translation from the original Japanese, and a fairly wacky distribution of strengths across the four playable character classes round out a disappointingly flaccid action-oriented RPG, that's not without merit, but is, nonetheless, a severe disappointment.



Edge rating: Four out of ten







Initial attempts to access the subterranean city (above left) are fruitless if you find it too early. After hours of searching for a solution, it turns out your character just has to be of a sufficiently high level



Retrospective

Super Hydlide is a forgotten episode in the history of the Mega Drive, as it was on the NES before it, and the Saturn subsequently. Even in its own lifetime it was outshone by action RPGs that were actually well-crafted, like *The Legend of Zelda* and eventually *Secret of Mana*. But although only extreme nostalgia could ever elevate it beyond the heights of mediocrity, **Edge** does have a soft spot for the game – particularly its foreshadowing of *Shenmue* by forcing players to hang around waiting for the shops to open.





The making of…

Star Wars: TIE Fighter

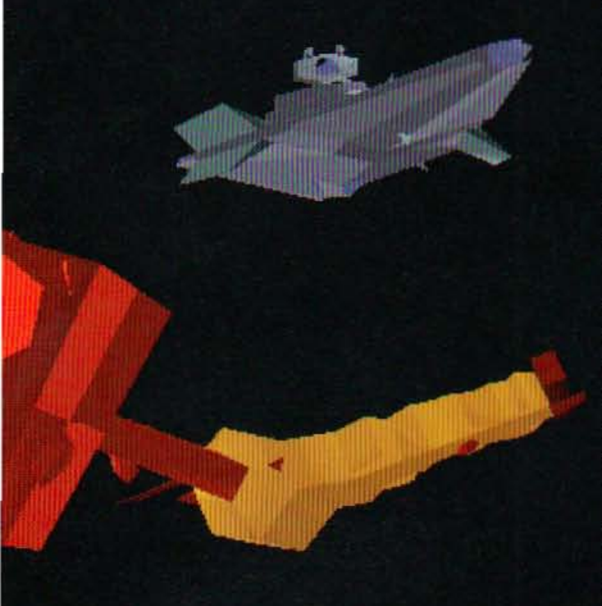
Back when the prequels were just a menacing glint in George's eye and LucasArts' videogame gatling gun had yet to fire up, Totally Games created one of the finest ever spin-offs to grace the 'Star Wars' universe…

Original format: **PC**
Publisher: **LucasArts**
Developer: **Totally Games**
Origin: **US**
Original release date: **1994**



The opening words would, of course, have been familiar to any gamer: "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away…" But the words that subsequently proceeded up the screen accompanied by *that* musical score, were a reminder that this game offered a new perspective on the *Star Wars* universe: "At the battle of Yavin, Rebel terrorists, aided by spies and traitors within the Empire, struck a cowardly blow at the new symbol of Imperial power… The Death Star!"

Although it's been endorsed by history, the decision to tell the story from the position of the bad guys was a bold move for a publisher that had yet to fully appreciate the marketing potential of the videogame. Yet it was vindicated by one of the most elegant *Star Wars* titles ever created,



improving upon the formula laid down by its predecessor – the brilliant *X-Wing* – in almost every way.

"It was definitely a risky design decision on our part," agrees **Larry Holland**, founder of the then-fledgling Totally Games. "But I always knew that there were two sides to every story. It took some convincing internally when I was proposing the idea to the marketing folks, but they warmed up to it quickly. We thought we could pull it off if we played it straight and not tongue-in-cheek, to take it from the vantage point of the Empire, and the attempt to maintain the coherence of this great empire. And then when we went into the story a little deeper, we could add all these rich textures, so that within the empire there were some good guys and there were evil guys in conflict, which added a new dimension to the conflict with the Rebel Alliance."

Split decisions

It wasn't the first time Holland had decided that there were two sides to every story. His relationship with LucasArts had been built up over the course of some seven years, initially developing dog-fight sims set in World War II; *Battlehawks 1942*, *Their Finest Hour: The Battle of Britain*, and *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe*. "Each of those titles took a dual perspective of the conflict," he asserts. "They portrayed the hardware, the airplanes, the content from a dual perspective – so for example *The Battle of Britain* portrayed both the RAF and the Luftwaffe perspectives. So for me it was very natural when I made the transition to *Star Wars* to be thinking about the Empire's perspective, and what the Empire thought about this breakaway Rebel Alliance."



Though rather functional by today's standards, the game's visuals still manage to convey the massive scale of the 'Star Wars' universe, and its capital ships with aplomb

Still, it was testament to the near virgin territory of the *Star Wars* videogame licence back then that he had such creative leeway with *TIE Fighter*. While Holland had been cutting his teeth on historical flight sims, LucasArts (or Lucasfilm Games as it was then) didn't even have the legal right to publish games based on the movies. Prior to *X-Wing*, there were only a handful of 'Star Wars' videogames; the Atari coin-op (and Broderbund's home conversion), the Parker Brothers' home console trilogy, and JVC's *Super Star Wars* platform games.

X-Wing, the result of the licence finally becoming available, is remembered by Holland as "a natural evolution of the mutual respect and trust that was already in place as a result of working together for seven years. Having tried to create an entertaining experience out of this authentic historical basis for several years it was starting to feel limiting. Moving to 'Star Wars', there was a similarity in terms of the WWII close action feel to the combat, and what with it being the early '90s there was a lot of freedom to flesh out the empty and open terrain in the 'Star Wars' universe."

It was also a period that was pregnant with technological potential. *Doom III* had just ushered in an era of the networked deathmatch, while the likes of *Rebel Assault* advertised the power of the CD-ROM. And yet games could still be turned around relatively quickly. With essentially the same core team of eight people that had created *X-Wing*, *TIE Fighter* was developed in just over a year, while working on *X-Wing* expansion packs.

Growing pains

The success of *X-Wing* had advantages and disadvantages for the team. New offices, for example, proved to be a double-edged sword. "During *X-Wing* we were in this house I rented," Holland explains, "but shifting to *TIE Fighter* saw us grow a little bit, and for the first time we actually had an office. An *office* office. A couple of months after we moved in we proudly put our name up on the window, proclaiming that we were a software company. Two or three months later somebody broke in and stole all our computers. Someone had actually dug a hole in the wall of the neighbouring office through to ours and then opened up





Originally a floppy disk product, a CD-ROM re-release enabled extra missions and voiceovers to be added to an already sublime blend





Some of the game's strongest points were the secondary objectives, set by a strange cloaked figure, and, for 'Star Wars' fanboys, the prototype ships

the doors and basically cleaned us out. Suddenly we're sitting there with a demo to deliver in a week, and we have no computers! After that we kept a very low profile." Good job they had backed everything up.

The major advantage of having already created *X-Wing* was that the process of developing a sequel could actually be one of refinement. Almost all the core mechanics of *TIE Fighter* were present in *X-Wing*, in a marginally rougher form: the strategic scope engendered by power management and shield rotation, for example, or wingmen who could be ordered about. "Like any team, we had filed away a list of things we would have liked to have done," recalls Holland. "So we had a whole bunch of ideas, we had experience, we had the technology and the basic toolset that we used as a foundation. That's what made the game turn out so well and go relatively quickly."

Learning curve

The major difference between the two games, though, was the difficulty level. Whereas *X-Wing* had some major spikes, *TIE Fighter* was, and still is, a shining example in how to design a smooth and elegant learning curve. From a tutorial and combat simulations through to battles that escalate in difficulty, a control scheme that seems to utilise almost every button on the keyboard became second nature over the course of the game. "Although that difficulty curve was a combination of skill and happenstance, I think we recognised by the time we got to *TIE Fighter* that building a mission wasn't just throwing a bunch of elements together and hoping that it turns out okay," he continues. "It takes weeks or months to take a single five minute experience and make it turn out well. One of the problems with *X-Wing* was that it was really hard to figure out what was going on. You had to play missions a gazillion times. I hear stories about people playing missions 30, 40 or 50 times [laughs]."

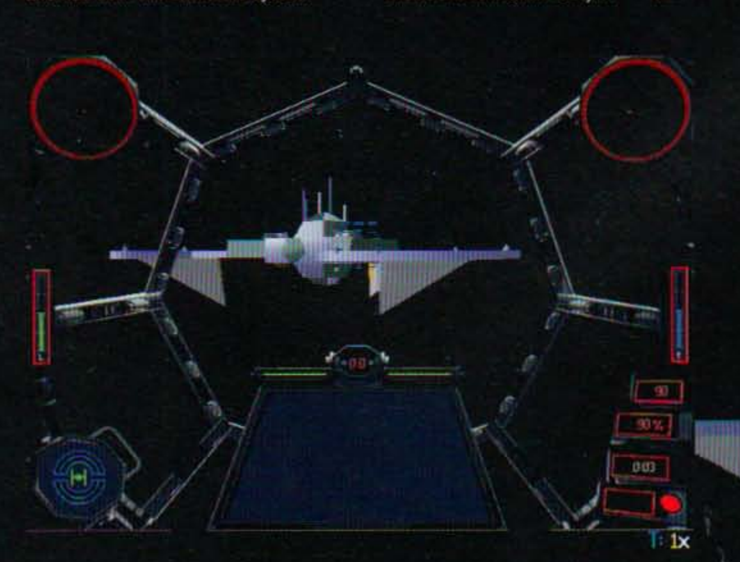
In spite of all that experience, the development of *TIE Fighter* didn't go entirely according to plan: "I remember I had scheduled a vacation for after the game had gone gold, and my wife was seven months pregnant so we had to take it. We were already away when I got a frantic phone call from the development team a day or so after the gold master date alerting me to a potentially catastrophic bug. So I was trying to relax and recover, and here was the worst possible phone call that you can get. It stemmed from – and to this day I remember – one of the things we always tried to do, which was to have the effects of one mission carry on to another, so that if you destroy a ship in one mission, it shouldn't show up in the next. So we had gone off the deep end in terms of design complexity and had built this elaborate system so that ships wouldn't show up, but this horrendous bug made ships disappear, so we had all these missions that were breaking because critical ships never showed up."

"I got a frantic phone call while on vacation from the development team a day or so after the gold master date alerting me to a potentially catastrophic bug"

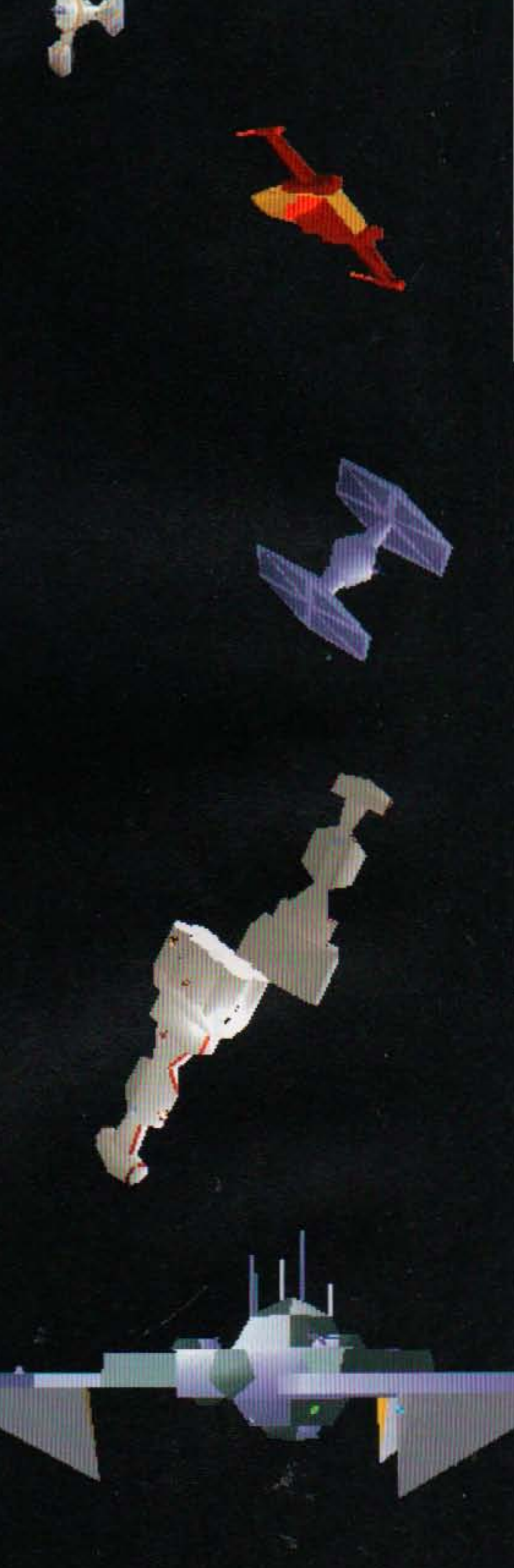
All TIEd up

Nevertheless, after patching things up, *TIE Fighter* went on to become one of the definitive 'Star Wars' videogaming experiences. From the unparalleled sense of engaging an enemy mind in a cartwheeling dog-fight, to the secondary mission objectives set by the Emperor's inner circle, the game is totally involving, from start to finish, and Holland justifiably looks back with some fondness. "I think from a game design standpoint I've always been very pleased with it, since I think it offered a compelling experience and did some new things, like multi-level goals," he reflects.

"One of its achievements is to create the sense of participating in an intricately choreographed battle sequence. It creates a whole sense of battle. I definitely think it held up well to the action-oriented games of its time, though it obviously didn't have a multiplayer component, which is where *Doom* just astounded people." That, though, would be fixed in *TIE Fighter*'s sequel. But that's a whole other story…



What is Holland's favourite game in the *X-Wing/TIE Fighter* series? "I actually like *Alliance* slightly more because it's got multiplayer. *TIE Fighter* is only a hair's breadth below"

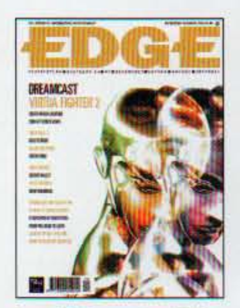


RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 65, December 1998

It's not easy being editor of the world's most important videogame magazine. Flying to Tokyo, doodling some words on TGS and JAMMA, then coming home to sign off a few pages sounds glam. But one tiny slip can cause the sort of nightmare episode that haunts for years. Like **E**65's *Black & White* feature, an entertaining piece made rather too entertaining thanks to four un-subbed pages being sent to press. Placeholder names included Christian Whatisname, Irish Geezer, Scawen Scary Name, and the incomparable Jean Claude French Bloke. Captions and callouts also went through untouched – "The Circuit Racing mode" caption appearing no less than nine times. Worse things have happened, though. Wait til Reset hits the *GTAIII* review issue…

E65 had numerous deliberate highlights. 'A Question of Character' looked at personality in videogames, 'International Bright Young Things' examined online gaming, and Arcadeview revealed Konami's *Dance Dance Revolution* as the success of JAMMA '98. Also noticed during **Edge**'s trip to Japan, some worrying signs for a momentarily rejuvenated Sega. "Then there was the busload of schoolchildren who, upon arrival, proceeded to stampede down the Makuhari Messe's main hall in the direction of Sega's stand – only to ignore it as they attempted to reach the hottest PlayStation wares before their friends," went the editorial intro. While subbing mistakes are one-shot funny, observation and insight are forever.

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?
"Lionhead's triumvirate of technical gurus, Alex Evans, Jean Claude French Bloke, and Scawen Scary Name have delivered a superior 3D engine." Cue dozens of headhunting recruitment consultants calling up Lionhead's reception and asking to speak to Mr Scary Name…

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?
"A great game is worth waiting for. There's no point putting it out early because it's only going to get bad reviews and simply not sell. That's no good for anybody." Ian Livingstone of Eidos. Well, it's no good for Core, certainly…

TESTSCREENS AND RATINGS:
Body Harvest (N64, 8/10), *Grim Fandango* (PC, 9/10), *Glover* (N64, 7/10), *Spacestation Silicon Valley* (N64, 8/10), *Monaco Grand Prix* (PC, 7/10), *Riverworld* (PC, 6/10), *Abe's Exoddus* (PS, 7/10)



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1. The Circuit Racing mode confines the player to a track featuring cliffs and unclimbable hills 2. The Circuit Racing mode confines the player to a track featuring cliffs and unclimbable hills 3. The Circuit Racing mode confines the player to… just kidding. It's a PocketStation 4. Ian Livingstone and some retro games 5. *Body Harvest* leads the review section… 6. With *Grim Fandango* close behind. How morbid 7. Ah, a little bit of humour. Well, swearing at least. *South Park* gets a Prescreen Focus 8. The Ascii Sphere 360°, still gathering dust in Edge's games room 9. Winners of the PlayStation Breakdance Championship. Remember when Sony was cool? 10. Cover star *Virtua Fighter 3*

inbox

Communicate by post:
Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email (stating 'Inbox' in the message header):
edge@futurenet.co.uk

I've just picked up this month's **Edge** and there were quite a few mails from people upset that their favourite game was left out of **Edge**'s Top Tens (**E**128). Quite frankly I expected better than this sort of posturing from the **Edge** readership.

The real point I wanted to make, which occurred to me when reading the lists last month, was the fact that for what feels like forever the **Edge** editorial has bemoaned the fact that (among other woes) today's software market is reliant on sequels.

Well, after a quick count I reckon half of the top 100 games were sequels of one kind or another. More often than not a sequel represents a refinement over the original game. Maybe not enough to warrant splashing another 40 notes, but a refinement nevertheless.

I, for one, am glad that titles such as *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* exist and that developers want to take their original ideas further. Would you really be happy to see these titles disregarded in the pursuit of truly 'original' ideas? Your list (or at least half of it) seems to suggest otherwise.
Paul Reynolds

There are sequels and there are sequels. **Edge** has always attempted to make it clear that it is not averse to every kind of sequel; merely those sequels that are rushed out to lazily rehash their progenitors, or those sequels that implement the features that should have been present originally, only to have been left out in a rushed bid to meet the quarterly reporting demands of ill-informed investors. Are you really suggesting that the world is a better place for the release of games like *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness*?

On a recent shopping trip I had no trouble getting hold of a 1939 French film, 'La Regle du Jeu' on DVD, but had to traipse through several shops before I was able to lay my hands on a copy of *Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow* – a game released only a matter of months ago. According to one assistant I asked, the store in which she worked had sold out of its original consignment of the title, and wasn't expecting to receive deliveries of any more. Ever.

Given the recent release date of the title, this is an appalling state of affairs, but it's hardly atypical. Games are frequently released only to be more or less withdrawn from retail only months later. Contrast this to the film I bought – made in 1939 and still available to buy, even now, despite a fairly low commercial appeal compared to massmarket Hollywood movies. The reason for this is that 'La Regle du Jeu' is published by the British Film Institute, a body with an educational, rather than purely profit-driven purpose. It is able to assess the worth of films along cultural rather than commercial lines, and make films such as this available for the relatively small number of interested people.

Videogames need an equivalent body; an organisation that can make titles such as *Elite* and *Super Metroid* available again for those people who were unable to experience them the first time around. The problem, of course, is that such a body would need to be funded by a concerned industry (unlikely) or by public money, which would require some sort of governmental approval.

MAME is undoubtedly part of the answer, but not everybody can afford to maintain a PC with internet access. The trend for re-releasing titles such as *Super Mario World* and *Yoshi's Island* on formats such as the Game Boy Advance is also a good idea, but it is only really viable, commercially, to release old games whose brands still have some cachet today. It's unlikely that we'll see reissues of *The New Zealand Story* or *Buster Busts Loose!* because so few people remember them.

There is another possible solution though. A couple of years ago, Nintendo experimented by placing special units in Japanese electronics stores into which could be placed blank SNES cartridges that, for a fee, could be filled with various Super Famicom titles available to download from the unit. This model of electronic distribution is an excellent idea, as it cuts down manufacturing and distribution costs to almost nothing once the units have been installed. Surely, with Sony making vague noises about utilising a similar distribution model for the PlayStation3, something similar to this system must be possible on a wide scale? In the meantime, people like me will simply be left wondering what we're going to do when the components in our trusty SNESes finally burn themselves out.
Steven Tucker

Part of the problem finding games at retail is undoubtedly due, in this country at least, to the near monopoly held by two videogame retail chains. With just two companies taking the lion's share of the retail market, as well as overseeing th distribution of games to other stores, their positior allows them to charge publishers for shelf-space, as well as demanding further spending on in-store marketing. It's a situation that clearly mitigates against games staying on shelves for very long unless they're immediately successful. As for what to do when your SNES dies, read on...

Having recently modified my Xbox (a well as installed a few hundred SNES games) I have rediscovered my love for emulation. In the past I played downloaded roms on my PC, and although most conversions are perfect, playing them in front of a monitor isn't the same as sitting in front of the TV.

Despite the legal issues surrounding installing chips in consoles, I personally would wholeheartedly recommend it to anyone with an interest in retro gaming until Nintendo, Sega, Sony, et al decide to release decent compilations.

While people will be eager to point out the legality of licensing rights and so forth, emulation is a non-profit operation, and if piracy and emulation didn't exist publishers would still be charging consumers £40 for games because of development costs. Unfortunately companies don seem to understand that people with any commo sense won't go near the substandard compilation that they release.

> "Videogames need an organisation that can make titles such as Elite and Super Metroid available again for those people who were unable to experience them the first time around"

Is it really too much to ask to be able to find a copy of *Aria of Sorrow* for sale? How else will the industry turn its back catalogue into revenue...

The solution? Release a compilation of DVDs featuring 50 or so of the best games on the SNES, or Mega Drive, or other defunct hardware. Until then pirating, copying games that will otherwise never see the light of day in this country, and emulation will continue.
Ghetto Buck

Recently I've been asking myself how I could have been absorbed by games that now appear crude or even mindless. Games like *Asteroids* or *Missile Command* and other classics from the late '70s and early '80s. I'd forgotten what had kept me hooked on games of this period until I played *Ikaruga* on the GameCube. It reminds me why I used to enjoy those old games, even though I had to start each new game from the beginning: it was to beat my previous scores, or those of my friends. It was even better playing games in the arcade where, for example, I could impress everyone by making it through to the end of the Ultimate level on *Marble Madness*.

But with games like *Viewtiful Joe* and *F-Zero* returning to these design techniques where progress is wholly dependent on finely honed gaming skills, the question I have now is whether I can spare the time to master these games in the way I was able to in my youth? I had believed that – aside from the occasional bout of *Advance Wars* – I was beginning to 'grow out' of games.

We should be clear though, that doubts of such kind are a legitimate response to actual changes in the games industry that mirror broader socio-economic change: the maximisation of profit through standardisation of products to meet perceived trends in consumer taste and the rationalisation of companies to that end. We may have greater choice, but it is one that is akin to that offered by a multiplex cinema: lots of films but most of them charmless, formulaic and banal. To continue the film analogy, the future of the industry lies with the arthouse: it is what happens to companies like Nintendo, Sega, Capcom and Treasure that matter.
CC1

Informed gamers continue to complain about uninspired games being released by large publishers. Most are aware of the risk averse strategies of these publishers, and the astronomical development and marketing costs that make such strategies necessary.

Nevertheless, we still hope that someday we will see an 'alternative' industry, to compare to the independent film movement; an arena in which new ideas can be tested and the most successful ones adopted by the established games industry.

The closest we have to independent film making in the videogame industry is the shareware scene. For some reason, though, this isn't the answer to our collective prayers. Despite the quick turnaround, low risk, and enthusiasm of developers, the shareware industry seems less capable of genuine innovation than the big publishers.

When I look at lists of shareware games, all I see are endless clones of old arcade titles – *Asteroids*, *Robotron*, *Donkey Kong* and (the most common by far) *Pac-Man*. Why, when these developers are free to make almost any game that they could dream of, do they re-tread such familiar ground?

I have to conclude that the biggest problem facing the games industry right now isn't the rash of redundancies or studio closures but the lack of new ideas.
Dan Griffiths

Have games really changed? I used to think that the games of the past used to be better than the ones that you'd find on the shelf of many retailers today and judging by some of the crop of software available, I'm sure many readers would agree. Recently though, I've come to change my opinion; have games really evolved?

Yes we've had the huge transition from 2D to 3D, but I think there's another leap just over the horizon. Let's take *Command & Conquer Generals*, for example. Being a Muslim I find the setting of this game tasteless, regardless of it being an enjoyable game to play. What interests me is that people are starting to ask questions regarding the morality of the content found in videogames.

Games have reached the point where people are not just randomly blasting aliens, but asking questions as to what and why they are taking certain actions in games. Gone are the days when a game was all about shooting mutant camels without consequence.

I feel very strongly that this element of asking questions and discussing issues of morality will lead developers to take a little more time to think about the actions taken within a game, and what their consequences might be. And I hope that this might lead to better games.
Nawazish Ayoob Rawat

While Edge may be filled with optimism about Sony's announcement of the PSP's specs, I find Sony's attitude nothing short of insane.

Although the PSP may have high specs, surely this is commercial suicide, as the thing itself will cost a bomb, and any games developed for it would have no chance of regaining the fairly substantial revenue that would be required to develop for the machine. Wouldn't it be better to use cheaper, more current technology that would allow a lower price point and lower development costs, than a price that would probably be double that of a full-size PS2, and games that cost the same price as their full-size counterparts? Call me pessimistic, but I can't see how Sony's little box will attract consumers and allow developers to make a profit.
Adrian Ford

Current rumours suggest that the PSP will be released at an affordable price which, combined with its multimedia appeal, and potential crossover with Sony's consumer electronics devices (including the PSX) is sure to give it significant mainstream appeal. Of course **Edge** may be proved wrong, but the PSP looks unlikely to be anything other than the sort of success that the company's games division is used to.

"Games have reached the point where people are not just randomly blasting aliens, but asking questions as to what and why they are taking certain actions in games"

Next month

EXTENDED HOURS AUTHORISATION

Due to magazine deadlines, I authorise the following person/people to work outside normal office hours* during the period/s listed below.
* Normal office hours are Monday to Friday 7.30am – 8pm and Saturday 10am – 4pm. Closed on Sundays.

BUILDING	MAG/DEPT	DATE	START TIME	END TIME
7 DAYS	E	10.10.03	8PM	12AM

Signed .... (Director/Publisher)

Star Wars Rogue Squadron III — page 092 (GameCube)	XIII — page 094 (PC, PS2, GC, Xbox)	Battlestar Galactica — page 050 (PS2, Xbox)	Maximo vs Army of Zin — page 096 (PlayStation2)	Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg — page 088 (GameCube)	Killer 7 — page 038 (GameCube)	Ratchet & Clank 2: Locked and L — page 097 (PlayStat
Hardware: Online Arena — page 107 (PlayStation2)	Voodoo Vince — page 108 (Xbox)	Fable — page 048 (Xbox)	Monster Hunter — page 036 (PlayStation2)	Ninja Gaiden — page 034 (Xbox)	Legacy of Kain: Defiance — page 047 (PS2, Xbox)	Final Fantasy Tactics — page 104 (Game Boy Adv
TLotR, Battle for Middle Earth — page 052 (PC)	Grabbed by the Ghoulies — page 041 (Xbox)	Drag-on Dragoon — page 098 (PlayStation2)	Gregory Horror Show — page 100 (PlayStation2)	Worms 3D — page 108 (PC, Xbox, PS2, GC)	Commandos 3: Destination Berlin — page 102 (PC)	Flipnic — page 099 (PlayStat
SSX3 — page 106 (PS2, GC, Xbox)	Disgaea: Hour of Darkness — page 101 (PlayStation2)	BC — page 048 (Xbox)	Dynasty Tactics 2 — page 109 (PlayStation2)	The Sims 2 — page 052 (PC)	Project Gotham Racing 2 — page 049 (Xbox)	Halo: Combat Evolved — page 109
Banjo-Kazooie: Grunty's Revenge — page 106 (Game Boy Advance)	Need for Speed: Underground — page 052 (PC, PS2, GC, Xbox)	Armed & Dangerous — page 043 (PC, Xbox)	Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge — page 050 (Xbox)	Medal of Honor Pacific Assault — page 052 (PC)	Pop Idol — page 045 (PC, PS2)	TLotR, Return of the King — page 052 (PS2, Xbox, GC

